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Security Council

Seventy-first year

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Tuesday, 26 January 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Nin Novoa	(Uruguay)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Augusto
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ndiaye
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Ms. Zerkal
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, the Ministers and other distinguished representatives present at today's meeting. Their participation is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Israel, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Libya, Lebanon, Maldives, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

It is so decided.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Ioannis Vrailas, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and His Excellency Mr. Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this meeting.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to brief the Council on the situation in the Middle East.

(*spoke in English*)

Sadly, 2016 has begun much like 2015 ended — with unacceptable levels of violence and a polarized public discourse across the spectrum in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Stabbings, vehicle attacks and shootings by Palestinians targeting Israeli civilians — all of which I condemn — and clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security forces have continued to claim lives. But security measures alone will not stop the violence. They cannot address the profound sense of alienation and despair driving some Palestinians, especially young people. The full force of the law must be brought to bear on all those committing crimes, with a system of justice applied equally to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Palestinian frustration is growing under the weight of a half century of occupation and the paralysis of the peace process. Some have taken me to task for pointing out this indisputable truth. Yet, as oppressed peoples have demonstrated throughout the ages, it is human nature to react to occupation, which often serves as a potent incubator of hatred and extremism. So-called facts on the ground in the occupied West Bank are steadily chipping away the viability of a Palestinian State and the ability of Palestinian people to live in dignity.

In an effort to overcome the political impasse, Quartet Envoys met with Israeli and Palestinian officials on 17 December 2015. They reiterated the urgent need for significant steps, in line with previous agreements, to strengthen Palestinian institutions and security and economic prospects, while addressing Israel's security concerns. Changing Israeli policies is central to advancing this goal, particularly in Israeli-controlled Area C, which comprises 61 per cent of West Bank territory and is home to some 300,000 Palestinians. Approvals of master plans for Palestinian sectors of Area C would allow for much-needed growth in these areas and prevent demolitions.

Progress towards peace requires a freeze of Israel's settlement enterprise. Continued settlement activities are an affront to the Palestinian people and to the international community. They rightly raise fundamental questions about Israel's commitment to a two-State solution. I am deeply troubled by reports today

that the Israeli Government has approved plans for over 150 new homes in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank. This is combined with its announcement last week declaring 370 acres in the West Bank, south of Jericho, as so-called State land. These provocative acts are bound to increase the growth of settler populations, further heighten tensions and undermine any prospects for a political road ahead. I urge the Israeli Government not to use a recent decision of the Israeli High Court affirming a large tract of land south of Bethlehem as State land to advance settlement activities.

The demolitions of Palestinian homes in Area C of the occupied West Bank continue, as do the decades-long difficulties of Palestinians to obtain building permits. The Bedouin community in particular is paying a heavy price. I reiterate the United Nations call for an immediate end to Israeli plans to forcibly transfer Bedouin communities currently living within the occupied Palestinian territory in the Jerusalem area.

At the same time, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains perilous. Eighteen months after the end of hostilities, conditions have not significantly improved. I condemn the continuing rocket fire into Israel from militant groups in Gaza. Chronic security and governance challenges and funding shortages have slowed the pace of reconstruction. Much work remains to be done. Meanwhile, the people of Gaza face dire unemployment and water and electricity needs. Meeting these concerns must be a top priority. However, none of this can be accomplished without the critical support of donors, the fulfilment of pledges from the Cairo Conference and the full return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza. I continue to strongly believe that conditions in Gaza pose a severe threat to long-term peace and security in the region.

Palestinians must also demonstrate commitment to addressing the divisions among Palestinians themselves. I strongly urge the Palestinian factions to advance genuine Palestinian unity on the basis of democracy and the Palestine Liberation Organization principles. Reconciliation is critical in order to reunite the West Bank and Gaza under a single legitimate Palestinian authority. Healing Palestinian divisions is also critical so that Palestinians can instead focus their energies on establishing a stable State as part of a negotiated two-State solution. Genuine unity will also improve the Palestinian Government's ability to meet pressing economic problems that are adding to the frustration and anger driving Palestinian violence.

The international community also has a responsibility, not least by responding generously to the recent emergency appeal by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for over $400 million to support vulnerable Palestinians. And as we continue to uphold the right of Palestinians to self-determination, let us be equally firm that incitement has no place, and that questioning the right of Israel to exist cannot be tolerated.

In an already tense regional environment, it is imperative to promote and consolidate stability wherever possible. In Lebanon, I urge all political leaders to work with Prime Minister Tammam Salam and to intensify efforts to resolve the presidential crisis. The Syria donors conference on 4 February in London will be an important opportunity to mobilize support. This must include meeting the huge humanitarian, infrastructure and stabilization needs of neighbouring countries in light of the refugee crisis. We are all aware of the strains on Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

I welcome the resumption of calm along the Blue Line and in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon area of operations following the serious incidents of 20 December and 4 January. All parties have a responsibility to uphold the cessation of hostilities and to ensure full respect for resolution 1701 (2006).

On the Golan, it remains critical that parties to the Disengagement Agreement maintain liaison with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. They must refrain from actions that could escalate the situation across the ceasefire line.

Some may say that the current volatility across the region makes it too risky to seek peace. I say that the greater peril lies in not seeking a solution to the Palestinian question. Some say that the two sides are entrenched in their respective positions. I say that we must not succumb to passivity, resignation or hopelessness that a comprehensive resolution of the conflict is not achievable. A lasting agreement will require difficult compromises by both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders — yes — but what are the alternatives? The continuing deadly wave of terror attacks and killings? The possible financial collapse of the Palestinian Government? Ever-greater isolation of the Israeli Government? A further deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the agonizing build-up to another terrible war? A hollowing of the moral foundation of both Israeli and Palestinian societies alike? A creeping moral blindness that

ignores the suffering — indeed the humanity — of one's neighbour? More unilateral acts by each side, intentionally designed to pre-empt negotiations and provoke the other side?

The parties must act — and act now — to prevent the two-State solution from slipping away forever. Upholding and implementing that vision — two States living side-by-side in peace and security — offers the only means by which Israel can retain both its Jewish majority and its democratic status.

As the wider Middle East continues to be gripped by a relentless wave of extremist terror, Israelis and Palestinians have an opportunity to restore hope to a region torn apart by intolerance and cruelty. I urge them to accept this historic challenge in the mutual interest of peace.

The support of regional partners in that pursuit is essential. The Arab Peace Initiative provides a valuable basis for broader support.

Finally, the whole international community must be ever-more committed to actively helping Palestinians and Israelis to rebuild trust and achieve an enduring peace before it is too late.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I congratulate the friendly country of Uruguay on its election to the Security Council and I thank you, Minister Rodolfo Nin Novoa, for convening this important debate under Uruguay's presidency. I also thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his important briefing to the Council on the current situation.

I would like to apologize on behalf of Foreign Minister Riad Malki, who had planned to attend this meeting but who, because of the recent storm and its impact of flights, is unable to be with us. I am honoured to deliver this statement on his behalf.

I would like to extend our congratulations to the other new non-permanent members — Egypt, Japan, Senegal and Ukraine — and I wish them success in fulfilling their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. We also reiterate our deep appreciation to Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria for their skilled service and principled positions on so many critical issues during their respective tenures, including the question of Palestine.

I express our appreciation to all of the ministers joining us here today, which serves to underscore the attention and concern they ascribe to the Palestine issue and to the situation in the Middle East as a whole. Among the ministers present is Foreign Minister Mankeur Ndiaye of Senegal, whose country plays an important role as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — a responsibility that Senegal has undertaken for the past 40 years, for which we are most grateful.

We are gathered again here at the Security Council, which for seven decades has been entrusted with the responsibility of upholding international peace and security, to address one of the longest-standing issues on the United Nations agenda, namely, the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. Every day that passes with this institution failing to shoulder its Charter duties means the death of more innocent civilians, more destruction of property, lives and the prospects for peace, and more hopelessness, representing a continual and growing threat to international peace and security.

While Palestine has figured prominently on the agenda of the United Nations since the establishment of the Organization, the plight of our people, tragically, persists and peace continues to evade us. Neither support nor solidarity for Palestine have been lacking. What has been lacking is the political courage and will to implement the countless resolutions of the Security Council and of General Assembly in the face of Israel's total intransigence and disrespect for all of its obligations, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. The failure to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable and to compel its compliance with the law has caused immense suffering for the Palestinian people, among them millions of refugees, thereby exacerbating an already deplorable security, humanitarian and socioeconomic situation, compounding the crisis many times over and undermining the foundation for a just and lasting solution.

In the past seven years alone, we have repeatedly come to address the Council and have travelled from capital to capital, while also presenting and supporting ideas, texts and initiatives and urging action. Since the adoption of resolution 1860 (2009), following the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip from December 2008

to January 2009, the Council has failed to take any action to redress this injustice. And in this period, at least 2,500 more Palestinians, among them hundreds of children and women, have been killed in repeated Israeli wars on Gaza and in military raids in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of civilians have been wounded and thousands have been arrested, detained and abused by the occupying forces. In addition, an inhumane blockade and vast destruction have been continuously inflicted on Gaza. At the same time, Israeli settlement construction in occupied Palestine, especially in occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, has continued unabated, at the expense of peace and the viability and contiguity of our State. Moreover, Israeli settler terror against Palestinian civilians has reached unprecedented levels and has inflamed religious sensitivities, particularly with regard to the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The world has witnessed on live television the perpetration of war crimes against the Palestinian people. Yet no action has been taken. As we speak, Palestinians, the majority of them youth, are being killed daily in the streets, with many executed extra judicially, by occupying forces and settlers. Israel is also continuing its policy of collective punishment, including the demolition of homes, withholding the bodies of martyrs, and widespread arrest-and-detention raids. Its suffocating blockade on Gaza also continues to obstruct desperately needed reconstruction, to deprive our people of all the basics of a dignified life, and to deepen despair. There is no justification for such violence and oppression against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population. International humanitarian law provisions, primarily the Fourth Geneva Convention, prohibit such actions and obligate the occupying Power to ensure, inter alia, the safety and well-being of the civilians under its occupation, not the other way around.

Claims that such violence and crimes are necessary to ensure Israeli security are offensive and must be rejected. All peoples are entitled to security, not only the Israelis. I repeat: all peoples are entitled to security, including the Palestinian people. It is not exclusive to Israel and cannot be achieved by illegal and aggressive actions that only fan the flames of violence and intensify anger and tensions.

Those unlawful actions must be stopped. We cannot allow the international community to turn a blind eye to the horrors being endured by our people, nor can we accept the continued refusal to end the impunity and the immunity that has been granted to Israeli officials, occupation forces and terrorist settlers, which is making those repeated, widespread and systematic crimes possible.

We cannot accept the reasoning of those who keep demanding security for the occupying Power while failing to demand security for the occupied people, who are entitled to, and assured of, such security under international law. The United Nations must act to ensure protection for our people in line with international law and its own resolutions, including Security Council resolutions specifically calling for protection for the Palestinian people. Precedents and the relevant studies before the Council must be considered. We are grateful to the Secretary-General and his Office of Legal Affairs for advancing an important study to the Security Council. As I said a few days ago, that study is not to be added to the shelves. It has to be studied by the members of the Security Council so as to arrive at the appropriate conclusions in order to provide protection for the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Israel must choose between occupation and peace. It is clear from the policies of successive Israeli Governments that the colonial agenda has trumped the peace agenda in Israel. And it is equally clear that, without international intervention, this situation cannot be reversed.

The continuation and expansion of the settlement regime are a destructive reality we witness every day, even if the world does not always see or hear the bulldozers. Just last week, Israel audaciously declared 370 acres south of Jericho as so-called State land. That constitutes one of the largest illegal land expropriations in years. Recently, Israeli plans to construct more than 65,000 new illegal settlement units throughout occupied Palestine were also exposed. Those plans, which include thousands of units in occupied East Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, including the so-called E-1 area, would sever East Jerusalem from its Palestinian environs. Moreover, hundreds more units are being constructed in the so-called Givat Eitam illegal settlement, referred to as E-2, south of Bethlehem, just to name a few of the more glaring examples. Everything the Secretary-General mentioned in his briefing with regard to settlements is correct and should be fully supported and acted upon by the Security Council.

It is an understatement to say that any settlement unit built anywhere in our occupied land brings us a step closer to the end of the two-State vision. The international community must directly address that and send an unequivocal message to Israel now, before it is too late. It cannot ignore these facts or the fact that the Israeli Foreign Ministry recently released a document inconceivably claiming that settlements are "legal" under international law. The illegality of the Israeli settlement regime has been reaffirmed by the Security Council in several resolutions, by the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions, by the International Court of Justice, by the Human Rights Council, by successive special rapporteurs and by international fact-finding missions. Nearly every single State around the world and all the members around this table, with the exception of Israel, accept that position. No one can deny that the forced transfer of Palestinian civilians and the transfer of Israelis to the occupied territory are grave breaches of international humanitarian law and war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Israel's arguments rely on absurd interpretations of very clear legal texts and on historical distortions and empty pretexts used for decades to justify colonialism and apartheid, which are two of the most condemned phenomena in history. Yet Israel persists in spreading both, in word and deed.

The most striking aspect in the Israeli Foreign Ministry's document is not the absurd argument made in defence of the indefensible, but rather the fact that it reconfirms Israel's total commitment to the colonial settlement regime at the expense of the law and of peace. The question therefore is not what we hope Israel will do to end the settlement regime it continues to plan, develop, expand, defend and commit vast resources to, but rather what the international community will do in fulfilment of its own obligations, as spelled out by the principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant conventions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory* (see A/ES-10/273), notably in relation to third-party responsibility. That must be considered and acted on as a matter of priority and urgency by the international community, especially the Security Council.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and freedom, are non-negotiable and cannot be subject to the occupying Power's goodwill or lack thereof. No State can, under the pretext of supporting dialogue among the parties, evade its own responsibility to uphold international law. This is a time for action and responsibility. Our region and the world cannot afford the looming breakdown, which would lead to more chaos and suffering. Those who believe the occupation is sustainable, or that we will surrender to it, are mistaken. We remain relentless in pursuit of our independence and our rights. We call on the Council to play its role and fulfil its responsibilities: end the oppression, end the occupation and help make peace and justice a reality for all the peoples of the region. That is the Council's duty. It cannot be delegated, delayed or dismissed. Silence and inaction are the accomplices of occupation and the enemies of peace.

Today we must ask, have we all done everything in our power and exhausted all means only to reach the point of failure? Is there no way ahead? We continue to believe another path is possible, that peace is possible and that confrontation and war are not inevitable. We have demonstrated a firm commitment to peace, but it has no chance of leading to a lasting solution without decisive international action in support of the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders and of measures that hold accountable those who are destroying it. In that regard, we are all aware that the Israeli settlement enterprise in all its manifestations is the most formidable obstacle to the peace we seek. Therefore, it has to be removed from the path of peace, if we seriously want to open doors to a meaningful process that could lead to the end of the occupation, to the independence of our State and to saving the two-State solution.

While we appreciate the strong positions expressed by all Security Council members and the international community at large against Israeli settlement activities, those positions must be translated into action. That action must start here in the Security Council. It must involve measures on the part of all States and must transcend the rendering of assistance. Israel must be held accountable for its actions. Recent international reports, including some by non-governmental organizations, have raised important ideas that could help identify a way forward. International mechanisms are also necessary, including the convening of an international conference aimed at ending the occupation and achieving peace, and the establishment of an international support group to advance that goal. Only with proper monitoring and

accountability can we hope to turn the tide and have a chance of reaching safe shores. The priority should be lasting peace, not temporary calm.

I came here today to appeal again for such action on behalf of the Palestinian people, who are entitled to and demand their freedom, and on behalf of all those who seek and promote peace and justice. Those needing pretexts not to act will always find one: they will try to make us address consequences rather than causes, tell us to wait until the next election, or to understand that more pressing issues loom, until everything collapses. In recent months, several States have taken initiatives and have shown leadership and understanding with regard to the urgency of action, and have been able to prioritize our cause among the many other key issues they are working jointly to resolve. The time has come for a collective process for Palestinian-Israeli peace. The time has come for the Security Council to reflect the express will of its members and of the international community that it is mandated to represent. Excuses, mild positions and half measures will not suffice. The international will is being tested. Failure is not an option.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Danon (Israel): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Uruguay on its becoming a member of the Security Council and for a successful month as Security Council President. That is no easy task, and you, Mr. President, have performed it well. As we begin this new year with a new Security Council, please allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the new members. On behalf of the State of Israel, I wish them much success. The challenges facing the new Council are vast and complex. The international community looks to the Council to deal with the new and unprecedented threats to global order and stability. The lives and the future of millions of people are at stake in the current confrontation with the forces of anarchy and instability.

Nowhere is that more true than in the region I come from. Whether it is the crisis of failed States or the rise of radical terror groups, the Middle East is ground zero in the battle for the triumph of the civilized world. As a small nation located in the heart of the Middle East, Israel is on the front lines. When Israelis, my people, look around them, they see the brutal civil war in Syria, and they see the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham in the Golan Heights and on the border with Egypt. They see Hizbullah strengthening its position to the north, and Hamas turning Gaza into a staging ground for terror.

Hamas does not hide its intention to prepare for the next round of violence, and continues to build up its terror infrastructure — above ground and below. Its officials boast of rocket factories operating day and night. They are upgrading their arsenal with longer-range missiles. Hamas is also rebuilding its network of terror tunnels. Those tunnels are an underground expressway of terror, leading straight into the heart of Israeli towns and cities.

Israeli security forces only recently uncovered Hamas terror cells that were planning to commit a wave of shootings, kidnappings and suicide-bombings. Even as Hamas plans attacks against Israeli citizens, and despite the constant threat of rocket attacks, Israel is taking steps to improve the well-being of the people of Gaza. In the past year alone, we invested millions of dollars to triple the capacity of the Gaza crossings, allowing 1,000 trucks filled with building materials and goods to enter the Gaza strip every day. However — and we all know this — Hamas shamefully seizes supplies intended to help the people of Gaza in order to build its terror infrastructure. Let us all face reality: the greatest opponent of the well-being of the people of Gaza is Hamas.

While Israelis live under the shadow of the threat from Hamas in the South, they also see the dark cloud of Hizbullah in the north. That terror group is committed to the destruction of Israel, and grows stronger and more sophisticated every day. As we speak, Hizbullah has over 100,000 rockets ready to be fired at Israeli cities. Hizbullah has long-range missiles that can target any place in Israel, and has obtained advanced strategic weapons systems. Hizbullah's actions demonstrate their disregard for human life. Hizbullah has embedded most of its military infrastructure in the villages of south Lebanon, storing weapons in private homes and stationing missiles next to kindergartens.

Take, for example, the small town of Muhaybib, in South Lebanon, where Hizbullah has nine arms-storage sites, five rocket-launching sites, four infantry positions, three underground tunnels, three anti-tank positions and a command post in the centre of the village. The town, of only 90 houses, has 25 military sites. Take another village, the larger village of Shagra, with a population of about 4,000 people, where the Israeli Defense Forces has identified 400 military sites.

Hizbullah has transformed those villages into terror outposts. That is the true face of Hizbullah — a brutal organization that deliberately targets Israeli civilians and uses Lebanese civilians as human shields. That is the definition of a double war crime.

Israel has repeatedly warned the Council about the threat of Hizbullah, and called for action. Once again, let me say it clearly: Hizbullah is preparing for another round of fighting. It must be disarmed, and the Government of Lebanon must fully abide by its international commitments and fully implement resolution 1701 (2006). Make no mistake, Israel has the means to defend itself. We will take all the necessary measures to protect our people.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the link between the threat of Hamas and the danger of Hizbullah. Wherever terror exists, Iran looms. Iran is the primary destabilizing factor in the Middle East. It funds instability and chaos throughout the region. Iran also has a proven track record of defying the Council's resolutions. When it comes to Iran, the challenge for the Council at this critical time is to be vigilant and to be brave — vigilant to monitor all of Iran's actions and brave to respond forcefully to each and every violation.

For Israel, there is no greater challenge than the challenge of peace. The road to peace is long and difficult, but Israel is committed to making every effort. Every difficult journey begins with a single step. Sitting down and talking is the first step to peace, but the Palestinians refuse to come to the table. What does Israel want? Simple: we want peace with security. That is the only peace that will last. And the Palestinians? They demand concessions without negotiations. They want to be rewarded for their unilateral actions. Rewarding the Palestinian Authority (PA) will only push the Palestinians further from the negotiating table. Prime Minister Netanyahu has called on President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority to resume negotiations, but they continue to refuse. Sadly, when the PA leadership is not negotiating, it is inciting.

Recently, after another brutal attack against Israelis, Jibril Rajoub, Deputy Secretary of the Fatah Central Committee, declared,

> "Whoever carried out individual acts of heroism, we in the Fatah movement bless and encourage them. We consider them heroes and a crown on the head of every Palestinian."

Who are those "heroes"? They are the Palestinian who stabs a young woman walking down the street, and who runs over an old man with a car. Instead of working to improve the lives of the Palestinians, the PA encourages terror by providing stipends for terrorists and their families; the more horrific the attack, the higher the reward. Payments can be as high as $3,500 per month — that in a place where the average salary is just over $600. Numerous terrorists have admitted to committing heinous acts of terror in order to qualify for a lifetime stipend "awarded" only to those who spent at least five years in an Israeli prison. For the Palestinians terror pays. It is their leadership that rewards the taking of innocent life with dollars and cents.

Even toys are used as tools to poison children's minds and encourage violence. Israel recently stopped a shipment of thousands of dolls dressed as terrorists, with stones in hand, destined for children in the West Bank. The "educational" purpose of those terror dolls is clear, that is, to serve as role models for young Palestinians.

Such incitement is at the root of the wave of terror Israel is facing. The challenge for the Council is to ask the difficult questions. Why does the Palestinian Authority refuse to condemn acts of terror against Israelis? Why do they refuse to sit down to negotiate? Most important, what do the Palestinians really want? If the Council believes that the answer is peace, then call on them to condemn acts of terror. Demand that they stop incitement. Stop giving them incentives to avoid a real dialogue. And insist that they return to the negotiating table.

The greatest challenge facing the world today is the plague of international terrorism and violent extremism. From Paris to Jakarta and from the Sinai to San Bernardino, the peace and security of the civilized world is under threat. Every day, the cruel hand of terrorism strikes somewhere in the world, killing more innocents, destroying more families and undermining more communities. As the Council assumes the grave responsibility for maintaining global peace and security, it must present a united front against terror. In that spirit, the Council adopted resolution 2249 (2015) in the aftermath of the terror attacks in Paris. The resolution declares

> "any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, whenever and by whomsoever committed" (*resolution 2249 (2015), third preambular paragraph*).

I repeat, "whenever and by whomsoever committed".

Yet the international community has made one exception. There is one place in the world where that absolute ban on terrorism can be ignored. Once again, the State of Israel is singled out and treated differently from all other nations in the world. During the past four months, Israelis have been stabbed in their homes, shot at in the streets and run over by terrorists using cars as weapons. Over the course of this wave of violence, 30 people have been killed and hundreds have been injured. During the same period, the Council has adopted 12 resolutions against terrorism and condemned terrorist attacks in France, the Sinai, Lebanon, Mali, Tunisia, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Somalia and the Sudan. Not once were the lives of Israelis murdered by terrorists recognized by the Security Council — no condemnation, no expression of solidarity, not even a statement of concern. The facts do not lie. The Security Council has been hypocritical when it comes to Israel. I would like to take a moment to tell members about one of the many Israeli victims whom the Council has not seen fit to even mention.

Dafna Meir was a 38-year-old Israeli woman murdered by a Palestinian terrorist. Let me tell the Council a little about the kind of person Dafna was. She was a dedicated mother of six children, including two brothers aged 4 and 6, whom she and her husband had adopted. Dafna was a nurse in Soroka hospital in Beer Sheva, where she treated Jewish and Arab patients. A few days before the horrific attack, Dafna composed a prayer asking God to give her strength to help people. Let me read to the Council a few words.

> "May it be Your will to grant me the ability to give medications to Your people and to the members of other nations who are in the devoted care of Your faithful messengers who continue their holy work day and night."

Last week, a terrorist attacked Dafna with a knife at the entrance to her home. In order to protect her children inside, Dafna heroically fought the terrorist until he fled. Tragically, Dafna Meir died of the knife wounds, in front of the children she fought to protect. The Council's decision to ignore the murder of Dafna Meir and of the other Israeli victims of terror is no simple oversight, it is the direct result of allowing cynical political considerations by some to take priority over the lives of people.

The challenge for the Council is to chart a new course. No more business as usual when it comes to terror against Israelis. The fear is the same fear. The pain is the same pain. The response must be the same response. Terror is terror is terror. If we want to succeed in these immense challenges, we must stop the hypocrisy and the double standards. The Council must condemn Palestinian incitement against Israelis. Such words of incitement lead directly to bloodshed and the death of innocent people. We must take a firm stand against all acts of cruelty and terror, without asking where those acts took place or who the victims are.

This is a challenging and critical year for the Council, for the region and for Israel. The terrorists seek to undermine our values and to dictate how we live our lives. Those extremists stand against everything we believe in, but if we stand together, they will fail. For the future of the region and the future of the free world, we must join together to defeat the forces of evil and intolerance.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay.

I would like to welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and to acknowledge his statement. In particular, I would like to highlight the broad participation of countries in this debate, which points to the relevance and timeliness of our exchange of views and ideas on this subject. We are aware of the relevance of the issue and of the responsibility with which we assume the task of presiding over this open debate, just a few days after having taken our seat on the Security Council, 50 years after our first participation as a Council member. In that regard, we thought it both timely and relevant to convene this open debate at the ministerial level, following the example set in October (see S/PV.7540).

Given their seriousness, these high-level discussions on the issue also indicate a high level of political commitment. The Middle East is facing a number of complex challenges, which have resulted in stagnation and the resurgence of various conflicts, the emergence of new threats and the suffering of thousands of innocent victims. Our country notes with great concern the paralysis of the peace process in the Middle East, the current situation in Syria and the expansion of terrorism in the region.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, the General Assembly, nearly seven decades ago, adopted resolution 181 (II) A-B, whereby it resolved to create two States. Uruguay firmly supported that resolution, convinced that it would allow the Israelis and the Palestinians to live in peace and within secure borders. In that regard, the then Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations, Ambassador Enrique Rodríguez Fabregat, said:

> "Those of us who are voting for partition are not voting against either of these two peoples. ... We are voting for both of them, for their progress, their civic development, their advancement in the community of nations." (*A/PV.125, p. 1350*)

This year will mark 25 years since the historic Madrid Peace Conference, where a series of bilateral and multilateral negotiations began, which led to the Oslo Accords. Despite various efforts and initiatives made since that time, peace between the parties still seems distant. We find ourselves in a situation where it does not appear possible that peace negotiations will be resumed in the short term. There have been increasing doubts even about the viability of a two-State solution. Furthermore, we also face an alarming upsurge in violence.

In that regard, Uruguay has maintained its firm support for the two-State solution, two independent States and the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and recognized borders in an atmosphere of renewed cooperation — two States free of any threats or acts that undermine peace, including acts of terrorism, and with agreements with regard to Jerusalem and other aspects, such as equitable access to safe drinking water and respect for holy sites. In that conviction, Uruguay recognized the State of Israel early on, and much later, when we accepted that the inconclusive process could not be prolonged, we recognized the State of Palestine, as did that many other Latin American States. Today, our country has embassies in Israel and in Palestine. Both countries have embassies in Uruguay.

We are aware that the solution to the conflict must be found through bilateral talks. We also recognize that the situation is currently characterized by paralysis, which only dispels the possibility of achieving peace. For that reason, we share the vision of numerous countries that love peace, have a democratic tradition and promote human rights. We believe that the international community must increase its efforts to support the process. We also encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table to achieve a peaceful, just, negotiated and lasting solution to the conflict in accordance with international law, a solution that also provides for the interests and meets the needs of both parties.

My country believes that by helping the parties to return to the negotiating table to reach an agreement is a moral obligation and a strategic imperative for the Organization and the Council. Compliance with international law and international humanitarian law, in particular obligations with regard to the protection of civilians, as well as the immediate cessation of violence and illegal settlement activity, which has been mentioned in a number of Security Council resolutions — all of these constitute serious challenges to achieving a just and lasting peace and appear to be fundamental, if we are to overcome the current situation and re-establish a climate of confidence that enables sustainable progress.

Furthermore, the parties have the obligation and the responsibility to advance towards mutual understanding and should refrain from adopting unilateral decisions that interfere with dialogue. We also reiterate the importance of international cooperation in efforts to support the socioeconomic development of the Palestinian people. The strengthening and establishment of national institutions and basic infrastructure are essential to efforts to ensure the viability of the Palestinian State, which has travelled far along the road towards being able to affirm its status as a full State. Such full statehood should also be capable of eliminating terrorism.

Uruguay maintains deep ties of friendship with the State of Israel and has forged similar links with the State of Palestine, which is why we express our willingness to collaborate and support, to the extent we are able, in the search for solutions that can finally and successfully conclude this nearly 70-year process, which, despite significant efforts, has yet to be concluded. Uruguay will persist in its constructive and balanced approach to facilitate the process. We will support actions that call for a cessation of hostilities and the initiation of peace talks.

We cannot discuss the Middle East issue without mentioning the ongoing conflict in Syria. It has a devastating impact, not only on the Syrian people, but also on the entire region and around the world. Uruguay is extremely concerned at the increasing severity of the conflict, which is causing irreversible damage to

millions of people and has taken a heavy toll in terms of fatalities, refugees and displaced persons. The civilian population remains the main victims of the conflict and the consequences of war. In that sense, Uruguay unequivocally condemns the systematic violations of human rights committed by all actors in the conflict, both the Government and the non-State entities. That is why Uruguay strongly calls upon the parties to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In that same conviction, we also condemn the obstruction blocking rapid and safe access of humanitarian aid to the affected territories, particularly in the areas under siege. We strongly reject the use of hunger as a weapon of war, which by any measure constitutes a war crime.

It is unacceptable that people are still dying while the international community has the resources to help those who need it most by ensuring that they have food, medicines and basic supplies. At the same time, the international community's efforts to reach a political solution to the conflict are fundamental, a solution based on a broad, inclusive and transparent national dialogue that represents all sectors of society and can enable Syrians to decide their own future. We welcomed and supported the major decision the Council made in December when, for the first time since the conflict began five years ago, the members managed to put aside their differences in order to agree on a road map for Syria with the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015).

The country has been devastated by all the actions of armed groups — among whom terrorists are increasingly prominent — invading territories, wielding banned weapons, recruiting and enslaving children, using schools and hospitals for military purposes and systematically violating the human rights of the population, especially women and girls. Extremist groups run joint training and recruitment camps for coordinating atrocities that have nothing to do with defending any religion or ideology. For such groups, the concept of sovereignty has no meaning; it knows no bounds or borders. Their threat is spreading like a pandemic across areas where civilians are the main victims. Thus, upon entering the twenty-first century we have witnessed a regression to the most disgusting forms of brutality.

These kinds of conflicts and violence call into question the capacity of the international system and the Security Council to fulfil their mandate, but we must act to combat the criminal scourge of terrorism. Through its efforts, the United Nations has succeeded in avoiding a new world war, but not the fragmentation and multiplication of these sorts of conflicts, whose transnational nature compels us to seek new strategies. Iraq and Afghanistan represent two other examples of humanitarian hells where failed interventions have left a vacuum that radical extremism has filled. It is crucial that we prevent this from happening in Syria.

We are also alarmed by what is going on in Yemen, North Africa, Somalia and northern Nigeria, in all of which there are close connections between terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Al-Qaida, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. In that regard, we emphasize how urgent it is that we confront the terrorist scourge effectively, within the framework of international law and coordinated through the United Nations. We also call for greater efforts to combat the financing of terrorist groups, through a comprehensive and large-scale approach based on political and socioeconomic strategies that can promote social inclusion, political participation and equality aimed at enabling us to deal with the underlying causes of this problem.

It is essential that we continue to do as much as possible to reach a broad political consensus on these continuing conflicts. We believe in diplomacy and the type of inclusive political solution that is vital to ensuring that there is trust between the parties to a conflict and that a peace can be a lasting one. We are encouraged by some positive recent examples, such as the P5+1 agreement with Iran, resolution 2254 (2015) and the inclusive talks in Vienna. Among others, they give us hope that there are better days to come for the peoples of this region, who want exactly the same thing as all the rest of us — to live in peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Council.

Mr. Ndiaye (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Since I am speaking in the Security Council for the first time since the General Assembly entrusted Senegal with non-permanent membership of the Council, I would like to reiterate our sincere thanks to the Member States of our Organization for this display of confidence in us, which we greatly appreciate. This is the third time that Senegal has held a seat in the Council. I would like to

take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of Senegal and its President, Mr. Macky Sall, to the ideals of global peace, security and justice.

I would like to begin by welcoming Uruguay's laudable initiative in holding a ministerial-level open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine. Today's meeting is once again being held amid escalating violence on the ground involving many civilian casualties, children among them, in the region, including in the occupied Palestinian territories. In Palestine in particular, we are seeing increasing acts of violence, intimidation and provocation, not the least of which are confiscations of Palestinian land, demolitions of their houses and creeping colonization. Such actions are likely to stir up hatred and extremism in both Palestine and Israel and thereby encourage an escalation of violence and insecurity between their peoples.

Moreover, in the face of international condemnation and the relevant United Nations decisions, the Palestinian people in Gaza continue to endure an unacceptable blockade that is depriving children, women, the disabled and the elderly of rights as fundamental as education and health. The same is true of the arbitrary detention, frequently through administrative means, of many Palestinians, including minors, as well as the strategies designed to alter Jerusalem demographically, geographically and culturally, which have only exacerbated this decades-long conflict.

The meeting on Jerusalem held in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 14 and 15 December 2015, at the initiative of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Indonesian Government, has focused attention on the danger of the forced Judaization of Jerusalem, the city that is a symbol of the three monotheistic religions. This policy runs the risk of turning a political crisis into a religious conflict, with incalculable consequences for the entire region.

This tragic situation should oppress our collective consciousness and for more than one reason compel the Security Council to act to meet its obligations to the Palestinian people according to a specific timetable and with the support of the expanded Quartet. The time has come for our Organization, 70 years after its founding and particularly with regard to its essential mandate to deal with issues of peace and security, to shoulder its responsibility for ensuring that its resolutions are effectively implemented in order to culminate, as was the case with the State of Israel, in the establishment of a Palestinian State, within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the 1948 United Nations partition plan. We must relaunch negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, based on a specific timetable, in order to arrive at a definitive peace agreement. It would also be advisable for the Israeli Government, which has affirmed its willingness to work for a lasting two-State solution for Israel and Palestine on numerous occasions, to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Arab Peace Initiative, which is based on achieving a comprehensive peace, beyond Palestine alone, with all Arab countries.

In the meantime, the Council should consider taking precautionary measures to enforce the status quo in Jerusalem's holy sites as well as ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people. In that regard, Senegal supports the proposal, made by France, to deploy international observers to help reduce tensions in the region. Senegal calls on the Palestinian political actors — namely, Fatah and Hamas — to join the momentum of the Cairo agreement to quell their internal differences and work towards the formation of a Government of national unity, with a view to facilitating the relaunching of the political process with the State of Israel.

I would like to take this opportunity to recall the urgency involved in rebuilding Gaza. I therefore launch an appeal that the pledges — totalling $4 billion — made at the 2014 Cairo conference on Palestine be honoured. The same urgency applies to the international community in continuing its efforts to provide the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East with the effective means to allow it to pursue its critical work on behalf of the millions of Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, particularly in the areas of health and education.

Senegal encourages and supports the Palestinian Government in its strategy aimed at joining international organizations and conventions in order to achieve lasting peace with Israel, based on international law and according to a peaceful approach. The progress made by the State of Palestine on the international level, such as its recognition by 136 countries, the presence of its flag at Headquarters since 30 September and its accession, in 2015, to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court are to be welcomed. Our belief is that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

based on two States — Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing alongside Israel — would promote better management of the security and socioeconomic challenges that are facing the Middle East, where terrorism and violent extremism are on the verge of becoming a global threat.

Before concluding, I would like mention the observation made by the President of Senegal, Macky Sall, in his speech of 29 November 2015 on the occasion of the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

> "Violence, in all its forms, is neither acceptable nor tolerable, and a state of war is certainly not the normal human condition. A peaceful solution is the only destiny that the Palestinian and Israeli peoples deserve, in the same manner as other peoples who have been able to end their differences through dialogue."

Based on that, Senegal, faithful to its principles and policies, will continue to work so that dialogue and consultation are favoured as a means to achieving the two-State solution, particularly in the context of the aforementioned Committee, which our country has had the honour of chairing since its founding, 40 years ago.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank you, Foreign Minister Nin Novoa, for presiding over this meeting and for your wise leadership in your delegation's first presidency of the Security Council. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing to the Council today and for his being here, which is testament to the serious challenges facing the region — a reality underscored by his appropriately bleak briefing. My remarks today will focus on three parts of the region: the Israeli-Palestinian issue, Syria and Lebanon.

On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, we remain very concerned about the impact that terrorism and the ongoing violence have on Israelis and Palestinians and by the lack of progress made towards a two-State solution. The United States strongly condemns terrorist attacks perpetrated by Palestinians. Those include the attack on 24-year-old Shlomit Kriegman, who was stabbed yesterday outside a supermarket and died earlier this morning. Another woman, 58 years of age, was also stabbed and wounded in the attack. The victims also include Dafna Meir, a mother of six children, who was stabbed to death in her home on 17 January while trying to defend her kids, as we heard earlier. Those and other reprehensible and inexcusable attacks against innocent civilians underscore the critical importance of affirmative steps to stop incitement, restore calm, reduce tensions and bring an end to the violence on both sides.

We also condemn Israeli settler violence against Palestinians and their property in the West Bank, such as the appalling 2015 attack that killed three members of the Al-Dawabsheh family in Duma — the father, Saad, the mother, Reham, and their 18-month-old boy, Ali Saad — and badly burned their 4-year-old son. There is absolutely no justification for any of those acts of terrorism. We all must condemn them consistently and unequivocally.

The United States continues to stress the need for fair judicial processes for all to bring to justice all perpetrators of violence and acts of terrorism. The recent indictments brought by the Israeli Government against the terrorists who perpetrated the Duma attack represent a positive step, but more must be done to ensure that those responsible for such attacks are held accountable. It is also incumbent upon the Palestinian Authority to do all that it can to counter incitement to violence and to continue to press for calm. In addition, in dealings with civilians and peaceful protests on both sides, it is critical that every possible effort be made to show restraint, guard against the loss of life and de-escalate tensions.

The United States strongly opposes settlement activity, including some steps that Israel has taken this month. We are deeply concerned about reports of a declaration of more than 370 acres in the Jordan Valley, in the West Bank, as State land. We are also deeply concerned about recent steps that appear to have effectively created a new settlement south of Gush Etzion. Some 70 per cent of the West Bank's Area C has already been unilaterally designated as Israeli State land or as being within the boundaries of Israeli regional settlement councils. Steps aimed at advancing the Israeli settlement project, including changing the designation of land, issuing building tenders and constructing new settlements, are fundamentally incompatible with the two-State solution and raise legitimate questions about Israel's long-term intentions. That concern notwithstanding, let me make crystal clear, as have Secretary Kerry and other United States Government officials on multiple occasions, that settlement activity can never itself be an excuse for violence. The United States is also following with concern the demolitions and evictions that have been undertaken by Israeli

authorities in several locations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On 21 January, 16 people, of whom six were children, were displaced, when Israeli authorities demolished four homes in Jabal Al-Baba, a village that lies within the area known as E-1. Those actions reflect an ongoing trend of demolition, displacement and land confiscation that continues to undermine prospects for a two-State solution.

Also alarming are the grave humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip, where Gazans face extraordinary challenges in their daily lives. This month, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) launched a $403 million appeal to meet urgent humanitarian needs in the West Bank and Gaza, such as emergency food and medical aid. We all must do our part to make sure that those needs are met. We urge all Member States concerned about the conditions in which Palestinians live to join the United States in contributing to UNRWA's appeal and assisting those in need.

As we have repeatedly made clear, we can continue to look to both sides to demonstrate with actions and policies a genuine commitment to a two-State solution. To that end, Quartet envoys travelled to the region last month to meet with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to explore ways to preserve a two-State solutio. The envoys will meet again early next month in Europe. We also encourage the parties to take steps to address the issues underlying these challenges, such as opening Gaza border crossing points, streamlining the civilian workforce, addressing infrastructure needs and promoting broader economic recovery.

Preventing the supply of illicit arms to Gaza is crucial, as is supporting a process that results in the Palestinian Authority's effective control of Gaza.

We understand the enormous political challenges involved in grappling with those tough issues on both sides, particularly in a climate of increased security threats, terrorism and distrust. But, as we have seen, the passage of time will only make those tough issues harder, not easier, to resolve. We encourage leaders to take steps that will preserve the possibility of two States and further prospects for peace.

On Syria, we continue to be horrified by the immeasurable human suffering caused by the country's brutal conflict. We have spoken repeatedly here and elsewhere about the atrocities and inhumane conditions — all of them man-made — that the Syrian people have been forced to endure, and yet the situation just keeps getting worse.

According to the Secretary-General's most recent report, an estimated 13.5 million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria, 1.3 million people more than in 2014. Six million of those in need are children, nearly 1 million more than a year ago. Those numbers raise the question: with all that we, as the Council, know about the dire situation of the Syrian people, and with all the resolutions we have adopted in this Chamber to address this humanitarian catastrophe, how can it be that the numbers continue to rise?

The conditions are particularly abysmal in besieged areas, where, according to the United Nations, nearly 400,000 people are waging a daily struggle to merely survive. The Secretary-General's report describes United Nations access to these areas as "pitiful". Less than 1 per cent of civilians in besieged areas received food aid per month in 2015, and only 3 per cent received health assistance. We have all seen the ghastly consequences of these sieges in the reports on the 40,000 people trapped in Madaya. An anaesthesia technician who works in Madaya's medical clinic, which had to be moved to a basement after the above-ground facility was bombed, told a reporter that he has started to give the most malnourished children syrupy medicines so that they could have some sugar. Maleka Jabir, an 85-year-old woman in the city, told a reporter, "I don't go anywhere. I just crumple up and stay in bed", as she was so stricken by hunger and health problems. Parents told aid workers that they were giving their children sleeping pills so that they would be spared being kept awake by hunger pains.

If any here have not seen the haunting photos of those children, you must force yourself to look at them and see the anguish being inflicted on the most vulnerable among us. We have a collective responsibility to hear their pleas. Yet, while the suffering in besieged areas has been vehemently condemned around the world, the parties to the conflict continue to block humanitarian aid from reaching those in need. And here I stress particularly the Syrian regime. According to the Secretary-General's report, of the 15 besieged areas, two of them are besieged by armed opposition groups, one by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and 12 of the 15 by the Al-Assad regime, which sits here at the United Nations as a Member State. Out of a total of 113 inter-agency convoy requests sent by the United Nations, tha Member State approved and completed

only 13. That is 13 approved and completed out of 113. That means that 100 dire requests last year were not completed. And for 80 of the requests, the Al-Assad regime, again a United Nations Member State, did not even bother to respond to the United Nations within three months. This is not an isolated practice applied in one place for a limited period of time. It is part of a deliberate, systematic strategy aimed at killing and displacing civilians.

It is true that a handful of convoys carrying food and medical assistance were able to reach Madaya over the last few weeks, and we commend the brave staff of the United Nations and international humanitarian groups and local actors who have pressed relentlessly for the delivery of lifesaving aid. However, it would be a grave mistake to think that starving people in besieged areas will now survive. Much more aid is needed. Fewer than two dozen people in serious need of medical treatment who, according to the United Nations, will die if they do not get out — only a subset of the 400 identified — have been evacuated from Madaya. And, specialized medical and nutrition teams have been denied re-entry, having paid brief visits before.

The 4 February conference in London, where the United States delegation will be led by Secretary of State John Kerry, provides an opportunity for the international community to fill the growing gaps in the United Nations funding of humanitarian appeals for Syria. We urge all Member States to put forward robust pledges aligned with the rising needs of the Syrian people. However, the mobilization of funds has to be accompanied by a much more aggressive mobilization of political pressure on those who are cruelly blocking aid from reaching desperate civilians and families.

We also must not forget that starving people to death is far from the only form of suffering the parties are inflicting on civilians. The Syrian regime continues to drop barrel bombs on civilian areas, reportedly killing at least 12 children in December and maiming many more. The Syrian regime also continues to carry out air strikes, such as the one that hit a crowded market in Jisreen on 4 December, killing approximately 26 civilians.

The regime does not act alone, as we know. It has the help of powerful supporters, including Russia. Credible monitoring organizations have documented the effects of Russian air strikes in Syria, which continue to target opposition groups and have killed many hundreds of people, the vast majority of them in non-ISIL controlled areas and with no connection to ISIL whatsoever. In Deir ez-Zor, not only has ISIL besieged the city, the group has also, reportedly, executed and abducted hundreds of civilians. The Secretary-General's report described one video released by ISIL in December, which showed six civilians being executed after being accused of collaborating with the Syrian regime. The United Nations reported that the executioners appeared to be children under the age of 15.

All of that suffering and barbarity underscores the urgency of working towards a political solution. To that end, we welcome Staffan de Mistura's invitation with regard to the talks to begin this coming Friday in Geneva. The initiation of United Nations-facilitated Syrian negotiations to reach a political transition in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) is a critical step towards ending the conflict in Syria. We are encouraged that the high negotiations committee assembled a broad representation of the Syrian opposition and has demonstrated a genuine commitment to participating in the political process.

Finally, let me turn very briefly to Lebanon. The Council has stressed repeatedly that the Lebanese people deserve and, indeed, require a fully functioning Government to safeguard Lebanon from the threat of ISIL and other terrorist groups, as well as to address the country's significant economic challenges, including those accruing by virtue of their hosting more than 1 million Syrian refugees, giving Lebanon the highest per capita refugee concentration in the entire world. As Lebanese discussions over the presidency continue, we support adherence to the constitutional process to elect a president, rather than any one candidate. It is critical that Lebanon's leaders respect the Government's policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, first enshrined in the June 2012 Baabda Declaration. As the Council has emphasized for years, Lebanon should focus on strengthening its institutions, resolving difficult internal disputes and building up the rule of law. It should not become involved in Syria's civil war.

Mr. Augusto (Angola): At the outset, I wish to thank His Excellency Mr. Rodolfo Nin Novoa for presiding over this important and timely debate. We commend the delegation of Uruguay for its excellent work in presiding over the Security Council. We also seize this opportunity to welcome the five new members of the Council, with whom we look forward to constructive cooperation. We commend Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for his relentless efforts to foster dialogue

and the peaceful resolution of conflicts affecting the Middle East at this critical juncture.

In 2011, with the so-called Arab Spring, the world witnessed the events occurring in some countries of North Africa and the Middle East, and the prospects of a new era of peace, democracy and economic development. Unfortunately, the outcome of those events did not deliver greater freedom and democracy; instead, they brought about the collapse of State authority, new and extreme forms of authoritarianism and the breakdown of national borders. The collapse of State authority further aggravated sectarian divisions, with people, in times of insecurity and uncertainty, leaning towards their ethnic and religious affiliations. That is the case with Syria, which has become a fractured State, no longer corresponding to its recognized borders, its territory divided into areas controlled by the legitimate Government, on one hand, and by non-State armed groups and the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) and the Al-Nusra Front, among others, on the other, thus poised for an uncertain future. The only window of opportunity lies in a decisive and sincere push by regional and world Powers to crush terrorism and embrace all Syrians in the search for a political settlement to the conflict.

The same applies to Iraq, a State broken apart, as demonstrated by the current state of affairs. Baghdad has little or no influence on the Kurdish region or in the Sunni-majority Anbar or Ninawa provinces. The disintegration of State structures in Libya and Yemen is also a troubling reality, exacerbated by extremely dire humanitarian conditions and the prospect of territorial breakdown if a determined and concerted effort on the part of the major Powers does not rescue these countries from the deadly threat of terrorism. Unfortunately, faced with such bleak scenarios, the response of the international community to the growing problems affecting the Middle East and North Africa has not been directed towards tackling the root causes of such conflicts and bridging the gaps among ethnic communities and religious groups.

At present, the most pressing issue in the Middle East is to defeat radical extremist groups in order to facilitate the peaceful resolution of prevailing conflicts. It is crucial to avoid the scenario in which the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham consolidates an extremist rogue State in parts of Syria and Iraq, which would then become a breeding ground for terrorists, spreading fear and hatred. Political, diplomatic, military and economic cooperation must be intensified in the search for peace and stability in a region distressed by double standards and inaction, and facing catastrophic political, economic and humanitarian conditions.

On the basis of this viewpoint, we observe with concern the fading prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians — a situation that constitutes a chief element of the current disorder in the Middle East and an effective recruitment tool for radical extremists in the region. We regret Israeli policies of settlement expansion. As stated in unison by the international community, Israeli settlement activities are a violation of international law and in stark contradiction to the public pronouncements of the Israeli Government on the two-State solution to the conflict. In that regard, we also appeal to Palestinians to persist in renouncing violence, recognize the State of Israel and respect the agreements concluded so far. We also remind Israel that it cannot remain a secure Jewish and democratic State while oppressing and illegally governing millions of Palestinians against their will. In that regard, we reiterate the relevant role the Security Council should play on this issue by adopting a resolution, with balanced and fair parameters, for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on our belief that the Security Council has the political and moral obligation to do so, and as soon as possible.

Diplomacy has suffered successive defeats in attempts to find peaceful solutions to crises and conflicts in the Middle East. After the long-overdue accords between Egypt and Israel in 1979 and Jordan and Israel in 1994, one case of success was the recent diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear programme, as an indication that any controversy, as complex and difficult as it might be, can have negotiated outcomes if the parties display the political will and commitment to seeking political solutions to avoid recourse to military means.

The adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme and its entry into force last week might work as a game-changer if the permanent members of the Security Council reach out with determination to regional Powers and countries in the Middle East — Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, the Gulf States, Jordan, Israel and Palestine — to address and resolve proxy wars and serious crisis situations affecting the region, including the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and the terrorist constellation,

the wars in Syria and Yemen, the Palestinian question, the fracture between the Sunni- and Shiite-majority countries in the Middle East, and above all for the establishment of a new era of cooperation and respect and for the social and economic development of the region.

Ms. Zerkal (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to thank the Uruguayan presidency for having convened today's open debate on an issue of the highest importance for the Security Council and the United Nations and that has probably remained on the Security Council's agenda longer than any other item.

A Middle East peace settlement has always been high on Ukraine's foreign policy agenda. Decades ago, back in 1975 — in a different international environment — my country became one of the founding members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and has followed this issue through all these years. Time has passed, but still today there is no country in the world that can distance itself from what is going on in a strategically vital Middle East region.

The Middle East peace process is at the very core of any effort aimed at restoring regional stability. We consistently support the peace process and believe that peace in the region can be achieved only if viable mutual compromises are made at the negotiating table. We know that the people of Israel want peace and we understand Israel's concerns, for it still lacks secure borders. We believe that Israel must enjoy the same right as its neighbours to live within internationally recognized and secure borders, free from fear, terror and violence. On the other hand, the Palestinian people, like every other nation, aspire to a peaceful life, decent work and prospects for a better future for their children. They have another dream as well — they want to enjoy freedom in their own country, with no restrictions on their movement. The Palestinian people, like the Israeli people, have the right to fulfil their dream of creating their own viable democratic State. The Palestinians, just like the Israelis, have the right to self-determination and justice.

There can be no security without peace. Military power can quell disorder, but it cannot create peace. Lasting and permanent security for Israel can be achieved only within the framework of a durable peace with its Arab neighbours. A stable, peaceful and democratic Palestinian State is in Israel's long-term security interests, and we believe that it is the only way to guarantee lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Peace depends on everyone's commitment; no one is excluded. For that reason, we support pledges of mediation and the tireless work done by the Middle East Quartet. Yet we believe that this mediation tool has to receive a new impetus.

Everybody seems to share a common vision that there is no alternative to the peace process. Unfortunately, we have all witnessed an impasse in peace talks and, in recent months, a significant deterioration of the situation. Especially worrying is the situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where tensions continue to rise. The lack of political dialogue creates an extremely unpredictable and explosive situation.

Ukraine calls on political leaders from all sides to work together and take visible actions to de-escalate the situation and restore direct dialogue. Ukraine reiterates its position that an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement lies within the framework of the unconditional fulfilment by the parties of relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the road map, the agreements previously reached by the parties, and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

There are numerous problems of much larger scale that multiply the threats within and far beyond the region: the flow of refugees, the terrorism threat and the danger of proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction, to name just a few. We should not lose track of other conflicts that have inflamed the region and could potentially have a devastating impact on the Middle East peace process. The Syrian crisis is probably the gravest regional challenge and one of the biggest global challenges the world has faced since the creation of the United Nations. This crisis has been affecting all spheres of life in neighbouring Lebanon, which has resulted in a drawn-out political crisis of State institutions and permanent security turbulence in the country. In Libya, we saw a promising start last December with the signing of a political agreement; we now look forward to its broad implementation. The situation in Yemen continues to hold the attention of the international community in the light of the failed ceasefire and the lack of progress in finding a political solution of the conflict. Ukraine remains committed to preserving the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Iraq, which faces critical security challenges.

These conflicts create nothing but fertile ground for the emergence and growth of violent extremism and

terrorism, which is a challenge to the entire civilized world. A rapidly evolving threat of violent extremism goes beyond the boundaries of every region. It benefits from existing conflicts and continues to destabilize the situation across the Middle East. In line with a viable strategy to counter this threat, we must address the underlying root causes that have led to this challenge in the first place.

To prevent further spread of violent extremism we need to work harder on the unprecedented humanitarian crisis unfolding in that part of the world. The recent refugee crisis in Europe is yet another reminder that we cannot turn a blind eye to the catastrophic humanitarian crises unfolding in Syria, Libya, Iraq and Yemen. These persistent unresolved conflicts are proving to be a major driver of violent extremism. We must therefore redouble our efforts to promote viable and lasting political solutions to conflict situations, including the Palestinian issue. We do not want to risk igniting yet another hot conflict that will fuel regional extremism even more.

We are convinced that it is in everyone's interest that the outcome of these conflicts not mirror the fate of the entire Middle East peace process, which has been unfolding for decades. We cannot afford the terrible burden of endless fires burning all over the region threatening to set the whole world ablaze. I hope that the tireless efforts of the wider international community and of my own country as part of the Security Council will bear fruit and that the vicious circle of violence will finally be broken.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first of all like to welcome and thank you, Sir, for presiding over today's important debate. I welcome the commitment of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal to participating in the debate and in making a statement.

The Middle East region has become a theatre in which military conflicts have become the norm, with an increase in hotbeds of tension and the growth in number of strongholds of non-State groups. The question of Palestine is the only item that remains on the agenda of the Security Council 70 years after being first taken up in 1946. The international community ignores the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, thereby fuelling terrorism and extremism, promoting the recruitment of young people and destroying their future. We are seeing these phenomena spread throughout the Arab world and beyond, in the form of the presence of foreign terrorist fighters.

We recall once again the importance of not allowing the international community's attention, and particularly the Security Council's, to be distracted; we must shoulder our responsibilities to the Palestinian cause, the occupied Syrian Golan and other crises in the region. Egypt calls on the international community and the Security Council to concentrate on the agenda item covering the Middle East and the Israeli occupation.

Twenty years have gone by since the agreement that should have led, five years later, to the establishment of a Palestinian State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Over the past 15 years, we have only seen an expansion of settlement activities, the Judaization of the Palestinian capital, violations of holy sites, the dislocation of Palestinian territories and the creation of the wall of separation on which the International Court of Justice has issued the advisory opinion. Twenty years have gone by and, instead of working to help the Palestinian people enjoy their inalienable rights, some have decided to use the issues of land and the Palestinian cause for other ends. International calls to put an end to the occupation have gone unheeded, as have efforts to improve the situation of Palestinians living under occupation.

Some have even gone further, casting doubt on the role, independence, neutrality and legitimacy of this international Organization. They have benefited from the destruction wrought by Israel as a pretext to criticize resolutions of international legitimacy and the role of the international Organization and its bodies, as if United Nations resolutions that uphold rights were the very ones impeding a peaceful solution of the crisis and as if international legitimacy were supposed to apologize for the occupying Power. This is an unprecedented and messy situation and a disgrace to the international community. The United Nations, with all of its bodies, must remain the only guarantor of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people until they recover the rights that they have been stripped of.

Egypt reaffirms that the parameters for the peaceful settlement of the conflict are clear. The claims of the Palestinian people to their unquestionable legitimacy are also clear. Palestinians and Arab States accepted the two-State solution and, in 2002, presented the historic Arab Peace Initiative to address the situation. Having historically rejected it, they accepted the normalization

of relations with Israel as long as a lasting solution would be found. However, the Initiative has not been taken up. We reiterate once again our commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative and its clear parameters, which are in line with resolutions of international law and take into account the right of Israel to exist in security.

We remain baffled about a core question that is repeated often in the international community: what does Israel really want, and on what moral and political basis? Certain Powers stand with Israel, and there has been no answer to this question. Egypt believes that the two-State solution is not a slogan to shore up political aims. It is, instead, a necessity to achieving peace and coexistence among the peoples of the region. We cannot systematically weaken the Palestinian peace partners or refuse invitations to negotiations or expand settlements or seize Palestinian lands. According to statistics, 70 per cent of Area C, which is more than 60 per cent of the Palestinian territory, has been annexed by Israel. Israeli practices are not constructive. There are questions as to the chances of success for the peace process and its future, the equality of the rights of Palestinians and of Israelis and the possibility that Israel could become an apartheid country.

The Security Council must uphold its responsibilities with regard to this situation. The Council has adopted various politically expedient positions to justify not being able to put an end to the occupation or its expansion. This is unfortunate. Even if the Security Council were to adopt real policies and continued to follow the question, the situation on the ground will not wait for political compromises. The expansion of settlements and the dispersion of the Palestinian people and the seizure of their land will continue to impose a new state of peace. There is no accountability, while expressions of condemnation and rejection have gone unheeded. The solution for peace is becoming increasingly remote, owing to an aggressive policy without any humanity in the framework of our commitment to a peaceful solution and the principle of land for peace, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative.

Given the absence of solutions, the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people and the seizure of land and attacks on holy sites for Muslims and Christians, we reiterate that we will work with our partners in the Security Council to safeguard the two-State solution and provide the Palestinian people with international protection, particularly in light of the study prepared by the Secretary-General.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I begin by joining others in welcoming the briefing by the Secretary-General and the presence and contributions of so many ministers.

Since our previous open debate (see S/PV.7540), the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has sadly deteriorated. The violence that we saw in October is fast becoming the new normal. We absolutely and unreservedly condemn every act of violence, whoever the perpetrator, whoever the victim, as well as all incitement to violence. We see three clear steps that the parties must take. First, they need to do all they can to de-escalate tensions, not inflame them. Secondly, they need to re-establish a mechanism to deal with incitement, as they previously committed to do. Those responsible for the violence need to be held to account. Thirdly, to achieve genuine peace and stability, the underlying causes of the conflict have to be addressed so that those who currently feel despair and fear can instead have a brighter future to hope for. Over the short term that means taking practical steps to improve conditions on the ground. The Palestinian Authority must move forward with reconciliation and retake control of Gaza. Israel must lift restrictions on Gaza and transfer more of the West Bank to Palestinian Authority control.

It is extremely disappointing that progress has not materialized in recent months, despite the tireless efforts of the Quartet. If specific and concrete steps are not taken, the security situation will deteriorate further and more lives will be lost needlessly. Furthermore, the parties will be even further away from the genuine peace process that Israelis and Palestinians deserve, and the prospects for a two-State solution will be further diminshed.

Continued settlement building, the demolitions of Palestinian property and evictions also continue to cause unnecessary suffering to ordinary Palestinians. Such acts harm the peace process. Recent months have seen further settlement activity, including the expansion of the Gush Etzion settlement agreed earlier this month, and reports last week that 385 acres of land south of Jericho had been declared Israeli State land. We are concerned by these developments and call on Israel to reverse its decisions.

The international community, including the Security Council, needs to demonstrate that we have not forgotten the people most affected by this conflict.

The United Kingdom remains committed to working with the United States, the European Union, the Quartet and the United Nations and key regional partners to encourage steps that improve the lives of Palestinians and ensure Israelis are safe and secure.

Let me now turn to Syria. The work of the International Syria Support Group provides some optimism for the prospects of a political settlement, despite the slight delay to the start of talks, from Monday to Friday this week. To maintain momentum, confidence-building measures need to take place alongside negotiations. As we all agreed in resolution 2254 (2015), we look forward to detailed proposals on confidence-building measures from the office of the Special Envoy as soon as possible. The international community and the Council must then help the Syrian parties deliver them. Syrians need to see improvements to the situation on the ground, and they need to see benefits in the negotiations starting in Geneva.

Yet the situation on the ground tells a different story. Indiscriminate airstrikes continue, including against targets that are not Daesh. There have been repeated and well-evidenced reports that Russian and Syrian regime bombing raids have resulted in extensive civilian losses. Attacks against the opposition and civilians will only undermine the political process. How can opposition groups explain their participation in negotiations to their supporters when they continue to suffer daily bombing raids, when they continue to see medical facilities destroyed and when their access to food and humanitarian aid only decreases? These barbaric actions must stop.

Given the level of barbarism, it is unsurprising that Syria remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The horrific situation in Madaya reminds us all of the urgent need for unimpeded and sutained humanitarian access and for greater support for the United Nations relief effort. The Syria conference in London on 4 February is the moment to show that support. As the Secretary-General told us this morning, we hope it will raise significant new funding from a wider range of partners to meet the needs of all those affected within Syria and the neighbouring countries. We welcome the support from the Council and the broader international community in this endeavour.

Let me conclude with a final observation. There has not been this level of diplomatic activity over Syria since the last round of talks in Geneva in 2014. It is in all our interests to maintain the momentum and to build on the optimism. It is the only way that we can ensure that 2016 is finally the year that we bring this terrible crisis to its overdue conclusion.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): On behalf of my delegation, I warmly welcome You, Sir, to the Council and I thank you for presiding over this meeting. We highly value your presence and the high-level representations today from Senegal, Ukraine and Angola. Your participation in this open debate provides prominence to a topic that has long been marginalized in the Council.

We are appreciative of the briefing by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and we acknowledge the clear message of the Secretary-General on the unsustainable situation in occupied Palestine.

Malaysia also associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Iran and Kuwait on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

For the purpose of today's meeting, I wish to focus my statement on the plight of Palestinian children and on the issue of illegal settlements.

Since the start of the latest wave of violence last October, children have consisted of almost a quarter of the total Palestinian casualties. According to UNICEF, last month alone 9 Palestinian children were killed and more than 205 were injured by Israeli forces and settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. By comparison, UNICEF reported no Israeli child fatalities or injuries during the same period. The intention to cause maximum casualties was evident as Palestinian civilians, including children, were deliberately shot with live ammunition or rubber-coated bullets by Israeli forces. In some cases, they were denied medical treatment and left to suffer agonizing deaths.

The indiscriminate and disproportionate approach of the occupying Power towards Palestinian civilians was captured in a horrifying video last October. In the video, an Israeli military vehicle entered the Palestinian Aida refugee camps and an Israeli soldier threatened over a loud speaker:

> "As long as you throw stones, go home or we will gas you. We will gas you until you die. The children, the youth, the old people — you will all die. We will not leave any of you alive."

Arbitrary arrests and detentions of Palestinian children also continued. Since last September, close to 400 Palestinian children have been arrested or detained

by Israeli forces. Many of these children have been violently seized from their homes at night, beaten, blindfolded, strip-searched, interrogated without legal counsel, held incommunicado from their parents and placed in solitary confinement. Even schools have not been spared from attack. Last November, over 70 Palestinian school children suffered from tear gas inhalation as Israeli forces fired tear gas canisters and sprayed skunk water at a school in Hebron. The illegal practice of brutally executed collective punishment also persisted as Israeli forces demolished the homes of Palestinians, rendering Palestinian families, including children, homeless and in destitution.

Meanwhile, in the Gaza Strip, health-care professionals from the Gaza Community Mental Health Program reported a sharp increase in the number of children with post-traumatic stress disorder, except that in Gaza there is no such thing as "post". Traumatic stress disorder has sadly become a daily reality. Even after the disproportionate Israeli aggression in Gaza of July 2014, Palestinians continued to suffer under repressive Israeli occupation and inhumane blockade. Children in Gaza who were once top students and cheerful suffered psychological trauma and became aggressive and withdrawn, had persistent nightmares and were terrified of loud noises.

Bearing in mind all the illegal Israeli practices against children, in violation of international law, we must search our conscience and ask ourselves: What kind of future have we shaped for the Palestinian children, who have grown up knowing only injustice, oppression, anger and violence throughout their lives? Clearly, the lack of accountability for Israel, including on the issue of the protection of children, has emboldened it to commit further violations with impunity. With our continuing inaction, we run the risk of setting off a ticking time-bomb, with grave repercussions for the region and the world.

Last year was yet another lost opportunity for the Council to make progress on the Palestinian question. Despite promising initiatives by some Council members, in the end we were back at square one, dashing the dreams and hopes of those who have suffered far too long and confirming that their miseries had once again been ignored. We were told to wait, and while we complied and waited Israel, with its insatiable appetite for land-grabbing, seized even more lands from the Palestinians, snubbing the two-State solution. Just last week, the Israeli Government declared 370 acres of land in occupied West Bank to be State land, effectively confiscating more Palestinian land and robbing the Palestinians of their future.

This month alone, the Israeli authorities continued to demolish housing structures belonging to Palestinian Bedouins in occupied East Jerusalem, rendering homeless over 40 Palestinians, half of them children. The forced displacement was part of the Israeli plan to build illegal settlements in the E-1 corridor for thousands of Israeli settlers. There is no doubt that these actions are illegal and contrary to international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, the illegal settlements constitute the single-most damaging factor that endangers the two-State solution.

The Council must stop turning a blind eye to these violations and start holding Israel accountable, based on international standards of human rights and international law. We can no longer accept excuses that any action against Israel, even if to uphold international law and human rights standard, is either anti-Semitic or will jeopardize the possibility of peace talks. Instead, we must expose these excuses for what they are — farcical pretexts to perpetuate the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine.

In the short term, pending a final and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, we need to seriously consider the option for international protection for the Palestinian people, including children. Such protection, which has numerous precedents at the United Nations and could constitute a confidence-building measure, would go a long way towards ending impunity and ensuring stability and security in occupied Palestine and the region. The international community should also pursue all legal, diplomatic and economic channels to step up its pressure on the Israeli Government and make it too costly for Israel to continue with its illegal settlement policy.

In the long run, we still aspire to a two-State solution — to the States of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security based on the pre-1967 borders. However, the prospect for peaceful coexistence is diminishing by the day, especially due to Israel's settlement policy and our inaction. If we continue to do nothing, this will feed into the agenda of those who seek to destroy the prospects for the two-State solution, and the two-State solution will eventually become a delusion. The consequences will be grim, not only for

the region but for all humankind. We must not look on helplessly as that happens.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Sir, for personally presiding over this very important debate of the Security Council. We acknowledge your presence, Mr. President, and we thank the Secretary General for his briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the Islamic Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

My country's statement will focus on the issue of Palestine, for we believe it crucial to resolve that matter in order to ensure peace and stability in the Middle East.

As the Security Council once again takes up the Palestinian question, we take note of and condemn the ongoing acts of aggression by the occupying Power against the inhabitants of the occupied Palestinian territories. Unfortunately, everything seems to indicate that the calls of the Security Council to end the illegal occupation and the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by the Israeli Government, as well as to bring the parties back to the negotiating table, are not going to be translated into concrete actions to reverse this complex situation. The lack of political will in the Security Council to resolve the Palestinian question is clear.

The occupying Power is openly and without fear of consequences ignoring the continued calls of the international community to end its illegal actions. It is taking advantage of the inaction of the Security Council and its reluctance to take up its responsibility to identify Israel as a State that has committed war crimes and occupied territories of the State of Palestine, in violation of the resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly.

Against that backdrop, the suffering of the Palestinian people is only increasing. Since October 2015, more than 160 Palestinians, including 29 children and 7 women, have been killed by the occupation forces and Israeli settlers living illegally on Palestinian land. Overall in 2015, regretably, there were more than 15,000 Palestinians injured in various incidents and attacks provoked by Israel.

At the same time, the number of the Palestinian men and women who are humiliated, attacked, persecuted and unjustly arrested by way of administrative detentions continues to increase. They are attacked by Israel's police and military forces, whose repressive attitude is a manifestation of the prolonged military occupation and the policy to colonize the territory. We join the demand that Israel immediately release imprisoned Palestinian children.

Venezuela condemns violence wherever it comes from and in all its manifestations. Similarly, we condemn attacks against Israeli civilians, who have been victims of stabbings and other forms of violence. Since 2015, that number totals approximately 18 people, according to information from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The world contiues to be shocked by the devastating effects of the military operation Protective Shield, an act of aggression against the civilian population that killed more than 550 children and left behind thousands of other children handicapped and still hospitalized. Many have seen their futures cut short, as well as any immediate hope of being able to resume their lives in order to build a promising tomorrow. Even today, humanitarian organizations continue to report cases of children in Gaza with severe psychological trauma, despite the attention and care they receive in treatment centres. My country vigorously rejects the blockade of Gaza, which since 2007 has kept the population in a sort of ghetto that impacts the lives of millions of Palestinians, in clear violation of international law. We demand the end of that illegal policy against the civialian population in Gaza.

Nothing seems to deter the systematic colonial actions of the occupying Power, with its construction of illegal settlements and destruction of Palestinian property. The illegal land confiscation, the punitive invasion and demolition of homes and the expulsion of Palestinians from their land are part of the list of grievances against the Palestinian people, particularly displaced persons and refugees. Such is the case with Israel's recent annexation of 370 acres of land near Jericho, in the West Bank, which were declared State-owned — act that has been condemned by the Secretary-General and on which the Council has not acted.

Faced with that situation, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela joins its voice to that of so many around the world demanding that the Security Council play a proactive role on this issue, in line with the responsibilities conferred upon it by the Charter of

the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security. Such a role should make it possible to address the Palestinian issue with determination and a sense of justice. It is therefore a matter of Israel once and for all ceasing its acts of aggression, ending the occupation and sitting down to negotiate in good faith with the Palestinians for an inclusive and definitive politial solution to end the conflict in the framework of the two-State solution, including accepting the right of the Palestinians to live under internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council.

Similarly, an equal footing for the parties is a crucial prerequisite for any fair negotiations. To that end, it is imperative that the State of Palestine be incorporated as a fully fledged Member of the United Nations. A decision in that regard would be a step in the right direction towards achieving a firm and lasting peace in the region.

Moreover, we must address as soon as possible the repeated calls of the Palestinian National Authority that the population of the occupied territories be placed under international protection in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and resolution 904 (1994), thus ensuring the integrity of the men and women of Palestine in the face of the continuous and systematic aggression of the occupying Power.

Let us act without double standards to judge severely the Israeli policy of systematic violations of human rights of the Palestinian people as well as of international humanitarian law, in the same way that the Council is ready to quickly condemn and punish other countries. Let us be consistent with our ongoing calls from the Council for accountability. The illegal actions of the occupying Power against the Palestinian people paint a picture of war crimes that must be put before international criminal justice in order to determine responsibility.

The stalemate in the negotiations undermines the prospects for peace and creates frustration and hopelessness among the Palestinian population, which can be exploited by extremist groups to fuel hatred and promote their terrorist agendas. With each failure in the peace talks, the patience of Palestinian men and women is eroded — after having endured more than 50 years of an illegal and brutal occupation that has denied them their human rights and their right to self-determination — in addition to eroding the expectations of Palestinians in the international community and multilateral organizations for addressing their just cause.

Let us not disappoint that trust. Let us not wait for the Palestinian people to rise up indignantly in a new intifada. Let us not wait for its youth to be ensnared by the violent extremism that plagues the region. There will be no peace or stability in the Middle East until the Palestinian question is resolved peaceably. Israel must respect international law, halt its violence and end its occupation of Palestine. We must act now. The Council must assume its responsibility, and certain of its members must show more political will, in order to resolve this question. We ought to contribute effectively to making the existence of the State of Palestine a reality — a free and sovereign nation in a zone of peace.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to reiterate the message of France with regard to the situation in the Middle East: we must not — cannot — give up. Simply put, the situation is untenable, as evidenced by the ongoing violence in Israel, Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories. Since the beginning of the outbreak of violence, there have been at least 153 Palestinians killed, mostly perpetrators of attacks, and 25 Israelis killed. That very aggravated situation cannot last, and we reiterate our condemnation of all attacks.

It is our responsibility to take action. France remains convinced that the lack of political prospects is the root cause of the recent events, as it plays into violence, radicalization and extremism. The increase in security measures implemented by Israel and the continued punitive demolitions and settlement activities, illegal under international law, fuel tensions and mutual resentment. In that regard, the recent announcements of new settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem are extremely worrisome and raise serious doubts about Israel's commitment to reaching a two-State solution.

The scope of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes beyond just the territory that extends from the Mediterranean to the Jordan Valley. The Palestinian issue continues to fuel regional tensions. No one in this Chamber wants Daesh to seize the Palestinian cause and distort it, in its own interests, as a compelling argument for recruitment. It is possible that Daesh could, in due course, settle in Gaza and the West Bank. We must do everything possible to make sure that does not happen.

The need for ambitious and collective mobilization by the international community grows increasingly urgent as the days go by. The temptation for some to defer the matter, to manage the conflict and to wait for favourable circumstances before talking seriously about peace is, in our view, not viable, because making the conflict take a back seat among our priorities and treating it like a frozen conflict could lead to a new outbreak. That is why the collective commitment of the Council members, the European Union and the countries in the region is essential. That requires creating a specific and credible political horizon for a shared goal, namely, the two-State solution, which we must safeguard.

In order to take steps in that direction, France remains convinced of the need for a change in approach along the lines of collective, enhanced and renewed support. The work undertaken during the meeting of the Quartet, which was expanded to include Arab countries and international partners during the General Assembly, must continue. That is a key element. The Security Council also has a role to play — a responsibilty to assume — and must fully commit itself to bringing about a solution that is acceptable to both parties. France will remain fully mobilized on this issue, as it is thoroughly convinced that the stability of that fractured and shell-shocked region requires a fair and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

There is also urgency with regard to Syria: it is urgent to break the cycle of violence and establish a political transition. We lend our full support to the process launched in Vienna and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2254 (2015), of 18 December 2015. It important that the inter-Syrian negotiations, which are key to achieving peace, can begin. We understand that Mr. Staffan de Mistura is doing everything possible for them to begin on 29 January. To ensure the success of those negotiations, three elements are necessary.

First, there must be a swift and significant improvement in the humanitarian situation. There can be no credible political process without immediate improvements in the situation on the ground for Syrians. The open meeting (see S/PV.7360) of the Security Council early last year exposed the persistent and abject practice of using sieges as a weapon of war. I reiterate our solemn call for the immediate and effective lifting of all sieges, as well as for lasting humanitarian access to all those in need, without any restrictions, and for the stopping of attacks against civilians. The Syrian regime and its supporters must respect international humanitarian law. It is not a bargaining chip, but rather an absolute obligation.

Secondly, the designation by the opposition of its own representatives must be respected. The opposition group that emerged at the Riyadh conference brings together for the first time a broad spectrum of non-jihadi political and military leaders who have committed to a shared goal of a united, free and democratic Syria that respects the rights of all citizens. It is up to that group to be the interlocutor with the regime during the negotiations. The negotiation process could, however, also lead to consultations with various stakeholders, namely, those from civil society.

Thirdly, there is a need for the discussions to focus on the political transition, in accordance with the terms agreed in the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). It is not a matter of creating a pseudo-Government of national unity, rather it is one of agreeing on creating a transitional governmental body with full executive powers to afford Syria prospects for reconciliation. Only a political solution will end the suffering and ongoing exodus of civilians and reduce the terrorist threat we face. I assure you, Mr. President, of France's resolute commitment in that regard.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I thank Foreign Minister Nin Novoa for his presence here and commend Uruguay for convening today's ministerial-level meeting. I thank also the Secretary-General for his briefing, which made for sobering listening.

New Zealand has been an elected member of the Council for just over a year. During that time, the conflicts of the Middle East have taken up much of the Council's attention — sadly, to too little practical effect. The fighting and killing in Syria continue, with people dying of starvation and as a result of bombs and bullets. The conflict in Yemen persists with horrific consequences for the Yemeni people, despite the self-evident truth that neither side can win by military means. Peace in Libya remains elusive.

And the Israeli-Palestinian peace process remains dormant, while disaffected people on both sides resort to violence, threatening a renewed outbreak of serious fighting, and the parties themselves engage in mutual recrimination, sharing only their manifest failures to show leadership and engage. That bleak situation is the responsibility of the Middle East itself, of those who involve themselves in the region and of the Council.

The conclusion of the Iran nuclear deal gives hope. It shows what can be achieved when States commit themselves to diplomacy, determined to find a solution. The confirmation by the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran has lived up to its undertakings and the resulting lifting of sanctions are highly encouraging next steps. We exhort Iran to continue on the path of engagement with the international community and to avoid acts that call into question its commitment to the agreement. It is not just Iran and the P5+1 that want that agreement to succeed, all member States have a stake in its faithful implementation.

We continue to hope that that example will be followed in Syria. The establishment of the International Syria Support Group and the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) were promising signs after almost five years of war. But we need those involved — in Syria, in the region and beyond — to make the difficult political decisions necessary to come to a political solution. The bargaining must take place at the negotiating table, not beforehand nor on the battlefield.

We welcome the news from Special Representative De Mistura that invitations to the talks are being issued today and that the talks themselves are now scheduled to start on Friday. While we were concerned at the delayed start, we support Mr. De Mistura's determination to ensure that the talks start on the best possible and properly inclusive basis. We urge all parties to bring the necessary political will to find a solution to the conflict and salvage what is left of Syria. The Syrian people need leadership, relief from the fighting and starvation, and some reason to believe that a way out of their current nightmare exists.

Amid the devastating and persistent conflicts in the Middle East, the Council has done too little to address the situation in Israel and the occupied territories. For seven years, we have been largely silent — and, worse still, inactive — on the Middle East peace process. In the year that New Zealand has been a member of the Security Council, settlement activity has increased, as has violence affecting hundreds of ordinary Israelis and Palestinians. Shockingly, street-level violence has now become the new normal.

Neither side has shown the necessary willingness to make the concessions essential for peace. Both have increased their unhelpful rhetoric and the blaming of each other. And moves such as Israel's intention to declare 385 acres of land in the West Bank as State land is deeply unhelpful and further hobbles the prospects for peace.

The two-State solution is the only credible model we have for bringing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. But its viability is slipping away. Given the levels of violence and mistrust and the entrenched positions, resuming negotiations seems improbable in the near future. Neither side seems willing or able to demonstrate the political vision necessary to broker peace. The vacuum is being filled with extremist voices, who will find an increasingly receptive audience the longer the stalemate continues.

Israeli, Palestinian and influential world leaders must stand up and reverse that trend. The parties are not so far apart that no scope exists for a decisive role for the Council. That is why New Zealand has been consistent in its call for the Council to play its part. It must assume a role in reaffirming the fundamental importance of the two-State solution and in creating the necessary conditions for a resumption of talks. We know some disagree. For some, the Security Council and the United Nations system are too partisan to play a role. For others, any gesture of involvement is seen as rewarding intransigence.

Let us change that perception by taking reasonable, meaningful action to encourage the parties to return to talks. Sadly, there was no agreement in 2014 on Jordan's draft resolution S/2014/916 (see S/PV.7354). In 2015, both France and New Zealand put forward proposals for Council action. Those proposals were met with mixed responses from Council members, and from the parties themselves. Some wanted more, some wanted less, some wanted nothing at all.

Agreement will inevitably require compromise. It may well be that, after seven years of inaction, a Council contribution will have to begin with a single step. We have suggested what such a step might look like. We remain ready to take our proposed draft resolution forward. But we are also ready to support any other reasonable initiative aimed at generating momentum towards peace talks, and in that regard we have listened carefully to the statement just made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt. For the Council to do nothing is not an option. We hope that 2016 will be remembered as the year when we, as a Council, found the requisite political will and determination to affirm the two-State solution and set out a path towards a resumption of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In recent years, we have seen an increase in the potential for conflict in the vast expanses of the Middle East and North Africa — from Libya to Iraq. Against that backdrop, an unprecedented increase in the terrorist threat has also occurred. But in that context we must not underestimate the explosive nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has lasted far too long. The common opinion that that conflict is something to which one has grown accustomed and that it will resolve itself is an untenable fallacy. Efforts must be made to extricate the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from its current sluggish state. Otherwise, the degradation of the situation will continue. The recent spike in violence in the Palestinian territories and in Israel is the most recent illustration of that trend.

Progress towards a political settlement means that settlement activity needs to stop. We are worried about the plans of the Israeli authorities to confiscate another 150 hectares of land south of Jericho. The policy of fait accompli conducted by the Israeli authorities undermines, in a very literal sense, the two-State solution. We are convinced that the main strategic goal should be to revive the negotiating track. Currently, substantive measures must be taken together, based on Israeli and Palestinian agreements that strengthen the Palestinian political and economic institutions, taking into account, of course, the legitimate concerns of Israel in the area of security.

In the current difficult situation, the Quartet, which speaks on behalf of the international community, is seeking a solution and a way out of the current dangerous impasse. As a result of the ministerial meetings of the Quartet on 30 September 2015 on the margins of the General Assembly at its seventieth session in New York City, as well as of similar meetings held on 23 October last year in Vienna, statements were adopted that focused on the need to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions on the settlement of the Middle East conflict. We believe that the recent visit of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to Israel and Palestine was useful. Meetings took place with the chief negotiators of the parties, as well as with the leadership of the Foreign Ministries and security agencies.

We think that the Security Council should play an important role in efforts to settle the Middle East conflict. So as to avoid yet another acute crisis with regard to the Gaza Strip, two tasks need to be tackled: extending the control of the central Palestinian authorities in the Gaza Strip and ensuring stability around that territory. The solutions to those tasks should be sought exclusively within the framework of ensuring inter-Palestinian unity based on the Palestine Liberation Organization. We are working on an ongoing basis on the issue with the regional parties.

We expect that inter-Syrian talks will begin in the very near future. The launching of the Vienna process, which was endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2254 (2015), and the emergence of a number of factors conducive to a political settlement in Syria have created a unique prospect for progress in settling that conflict. We must seize that window of opportunity. We are surprised that even today some Security Council members continue to muddy the water by putting forward their unilateral interpretations of resolution 2254 (2015). That is irresponsible, and such habits should be cast aside.

In order to assist the Syrian Government, the Russian Federation continues to provide military assistance to that Government in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups. For the first time, ISIL forces have lost their footholds. Russia is also helping in the humanitarian sphere by providing humanitarian assistance, including in Deir ez-Zor, where ISIL fighters have besieged over 100,000 civilians. We have heard various ideas regarding Russia's activities in Syria. We firmly reject them. It is especially strange when they are disseminated by countries that are part of the Western coalition, which, unlike the Russian Air and Space Forces, is acting in an extremely untransparent manner and not very effectively at all. But our American and English colleagues always refuse to give information about the numerous civilian victims of the coalition's air strikes in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan.

There is an urgent need to restore national unity in Libya, where there is increasing evidence of the presence of terrorist units there. ISIL is attempting to create corridors between conflict-ridden countries in the Middle East and the North African Mediterranean. We urge the Libyan parties to respond responsibly to the efforts of the United Nations to approach the issue of forming a Government of national unity and to unite in combating terrorism.

We cannot call the situation in Yemen anything other than tragic. Fierce clashes in the country are

continuing. Civilians are being killed, and the civilian infrastructure is being destroyed. We call on all the parties to the conflict to cease hostilities immediately and to resolve all existing problems through negotiations. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Yemen, Mr. Ahmed Ismail, to bring that situation to a political track and begin an inter-Yemeni dialogue for a sustainable settlement. For our part, we shall provide requisite support to those efforts.

An effective response to the difficult challenges in the Middle East and North Africa can only be found collectively. There is a well-known proposal from the Russian Federation for broad cooperation to push back against terrorism and ensure a political settlements of existing crises, which remains on the table.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates Uruguay's initiative to organize this ministerial-level open debate on the question of the Middle East and welcomes Foreign Minister Nin Novoa to preside over this meeting. I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and commend his active engagement in promoting the Middle East peace process. China carefully listened to the statements delivered by the observer of Palestine and the representative of Israel.

At present, the Middle East remains beset by conflict and war. The history of the Middle East has shown time and again that there can be no winner in the conflict and that peace is the ultimate and irresistible historical trend. Chinese President Xi Jinping recently visited the Middle East, where he reaffirmed China's Middle East policy and called for focused efforts towards peace and development. He stressed the need to resolve differences through dialogue and for the people of the region to choose a development path that takes their particular conditions into account. He put forward a Chinese solution based on a holistic approach that addresses both the symptoms and the root causes of the conflict. His solution enjoys the broad appreciation of the countries of the region. China stands ready, to continue to work with the international community to achieve peace, stability and development in the Middle East.

The question of Palestine lies at the root of everything affecting peace in the Middle East. Currently, peace talks between Palestine and Israel remain deeply deadlocked. Conflict is intensifying and the security situation is deteriorating. It is the joint responsibility of the international community to safeguard the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. Achieving a comprehensive and just solution to the question of Palestine would serve the interests of all parties concerned. China hopes that the international community will address the issue through attending to the following priorities.

First, the international community should urge Palestine and Israel to take immediate action to establish a ceasefire, end the violence and ease tensions. As the party with the upper hand, Israel should take the lead in that regard. At the same time, the legitimate security concerns of the countries of the region should be given due attention.

Secondly, the international community should take more robust measures and reactivate the political peace process so as to bring both parties back to the negotiating table as soon as possible. At the same time, it is necessary to uphold justice and redress historical injustices as soon as possible. Thirdly, the international community should further consolidate consensus and establish a new mechanism for peace in the Middle East. It should support the efforts of the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in that connection. The United Nations should urge Member States to effectively implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions on the question of Palestine and Israel. The Security Council should actively respond to the legitimate demands put forward by Palestine and the Arab States and seriously consider the question of providing international protection to the Palestinian people.

Fourthly, the international community should continue to promote the economic and reconstruction process, enhance its economic assistance to and cooperation with Palestine and alleviate its humanitarian situation so as to bring hope to the Palestinian people.

China is a firm supporter of peace between Palestine and Israel. In his recent speech at the headquarters of the League of Arab States, President Xi Jinping reiterated China's firm support for the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. China supports the establishment of a Palestinian State with full sovereignty, based on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and understands its legitimate demands to join the international community as a State. In order to improve the livelihood of the Palestinian people, China has decided to provide gratis assistance in the amount of ¥50 million. China is ready,

together with the international community, to play its part in pushing forward the Middle East peace process.

With regard to the question of Syria, China commends the mediation efforts carried out by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and supports the leading role the United Nations plays in mediating a political solution on the question of Syria. The search for a political solution is now presented with an important window of opportunity, and China hopes that the new round of peace talks in Geneva can be held shortly. The international community should continue to support the efforts of the United Nations to encourage both parties to the negotiations to take the future and greater good of their country into consideration, proceed based on the fundamental interests of the Syrian people, demonstrate sincerity, seek common ground and resolve their differences so as to ensure that the peace process stays the course and achieves positive results. We hope that the international community will work jointly to maintain the current positive momentum towards a political solution.

Cooperation in international counter-terrorism requires the international community to strengthen its consensus in this field. China calls on the relevant military alliances on counter-terrorism to strengthen communication and cooperation. Counter-terrorism cannot be subject to double standards and terrorism should not be linked to a specific ethnicity, religion or civilization. We support the efforts of the international community to further strengthen coordination in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and other recognized basic norms of international law, and to create synergy in counter-terrorism efforts within the United Nations framework.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan) (*spoke in Spanish*): We warmly welcome you, Sir, to the Security Council. We are very pleased to be serving on the Council alongside Uruguay.

(*spoke in English*)

In order to save time, I will state my salient points and distribute my full text to the Council. Let me start by looking at the overall situation in the Middle East.

One year ago, the Council strongly condemned the heinous murder of two Japanese citizens in Syria by terrorists. A year later, terrorism and acts of violence continue to exploit the political vacuums and economic difficulties in the region, with civilians bearing the brunt of the cost. Further terrorist attacks in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America serve as a cruel reminder of the far-reaching repercussions of the growing instability in the Middle East. From Syria to Yemen, the numerous crises in the Middle East urgently require political solutions. We therefore welcome the resumption of the Yemen peace talks and look forward to the initiation of the intra-Syrian dialogue on 29 January.

We note with concern, however, the rise in regional tensions. Provocative rhetoric and the drawing of fault lines do not contribute to political solutions. Dialogue must be maintained at all times; it is the essence and power of diplomacy. The Security Council must continue to urge dialogue and take measures to reduce tensions in that volatile region.

The rise of extremist ideology and the mass movement of refugees are occurring where economic prospects are truncated, civilians indiscriminately attacked and families uprooted. Let us not forget these underlying factors, which fuel instability in Syria and other countries of the region. Under the concept of human security, Japan seeks to help empower individuals and strengthen communities from the ground up. Japan is currently disbursing $2.5 billion in non-military assistance to the region, from assisting Gaza reconstruction and providing education opportunities for Syrian children to offering vocational training in refugee camps. Furthermore, last week the Japanese Diet approved an additional $350 million in non-military assistance to Syria and its neighbouring countries.

Nowhere are a resumption of political dialogue and improvements on the ground more overdue than in Palestine. Positive steps on the ground are lacking. In that regard, we reiterate our call for a freeze on settlement activities, which are violations of international law and which severely undermine the viability of a two-State solution. While welcoming the increased efforts on Israel's part to address settler violence, we call on Israel to refrain from collective punishment measures, including the demolition of homes. We also call on Palestine to maintain its security cooperation with Israel, which is vital for stability, and to strengthen efforts to achieve national reconciliation.

It is the parties themselves who must reach agreement. However, we must recognize that the Council has hardly provided tangible support. The current impasse must not prevent us from moving ahead

where progress is possible. Japan firmly believes that a sustainable Palestinian economy is indispensable to the viability of a two-State solution. With that in mind, the Japanese Diet recently approved an additional $78 million in assistance, on top of the $1.6 billion we have already disbursed for Palestine's development. One outstanding example is the Jericho Agro-Industrial Park, which saw its first investment lead to the beginning of operations last autumn. In what was formerly a desert there now stands a modem industrial park capable of creating 700 jobs for Palestinians. It is the result of cooperation between Japan, Israel, Jordan and Palestine and attests to the dividends to be gained through peaceful cooperation. We hope the success of the project will attract further investment.

Assistance efforts must have a goal in sight. Postponement is not an option. Japan stands ready to play a constructive role, both inside and outside the Council, in working for the long-overdue attainment of a two-State solution.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a pleasure to have you presiding over a second Security Council meeting after yesterday's, Mr. President, and one that is no less important.

Spain has now been on the Security Council for one year, during which the region has unfortunately been facing some enormously serious conflicts. In some of those conflicts, such as the civil war in Syria, the Council has managed to make some progress towards a solution, in this case through its adoption of resolution 2254 (2015). In others, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, no progress has been made. And not just no progress; what we are seeing is actually a gradual loss of confidence in the viability of a two-State solution, considered by the international community to be the only one capable of ensuring sustainable and lasting peace.

I would like to emphasize that violence and acts of terror, wherever they occur and in whatever circumstances, deserve to be condemned as firmly as possible. The parties must refrain from any kind of incitement to violence and, if a response is required, it must be a proportionate one. In any case, security measures alone are not enough to bring an end to the violence. We need to create a political vision and a negotiating framework that can give hope back to the Palestinian people while ensuring Israel's security. That is the international community's responsibility, and Spain believes that the Security Council can and must play a central role in that regard, as many other speakers have also said.

The international community in general, and the Council in particular, has various possibilities for action, and two in particular, the first being a declaration on the part of the Council. It has been more than seven years since the Council adopted a resolution on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is too long. Of course, it is not a matter of merely adopting a resolution for its own sake. On the contrary, the Council must reflect on the issue and find a way to adopt a text that provides added value. Secondly, Spain believes it is also worth exploring the possibility of holding an international conference that would restore the spirit of the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, through which we could try to revitalize the peace process based on what we think are two key elements, the Arab Peace Initiative and a regional approach to a new security framework in the Middle East.

Today, making progress towards implementing a two-State solution requires that we preserve its viability. The construction of settlements — especially settlements that have an effect on the final status of Jerusalem — in the occupied territories, which is illegal under international law, is one of the main threats to that viability. Ending the demolition of houses, people's forced displacement, confiscations of land and adopting transformative measures in Area C would be unequivocal signs of Israel's commitment to a two-State solution. Besides that, the disunity in the Palestinian camp and the weakening of its institutions are also structural threats to the possibility of building a Palestinian State. The international community must work to advance the reconciliation process between the various Palestinian factions and promote the holding of democratic elections in which all Palestinians can take part. The still unaccomplished reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and the continuing risk of a dangerous escalation of the violence highlights how important it is that the Palestinian Authority resume its governing functions in the Strip and ensure that it is part of a future Palestinian State. The launching of attacks on Israel from Gaza must end.

I will now touch briefly on the situation in Syria. The burden is now on us to build on the opportunity to bring an end to the conflict there, moving forward simultaneously on the three parallel tracks established by resolution 2254 (2015). First, regarding an intra-Syrian dialogue, we call on the Government and the opposition

to show full commitment to the round of talks that will begin in Geneva this Friday, paving the way for a process of political transition. Secondly, with regard to confidence-building measures, freeing prisoners and ending aerial attacks are now more necessary than ever if the negotiations are to seem credible. Thirdly, we must not lose sight of the goal of achieving a nationwide ceasefire to be monitored by the United Nations. We are close to the fifth anniversary of the war in Syria and we need to be able to create prospects for hope for its people. Based on resolution 2254 (2015), Spain believes that the United Nations should play a central role in this process, and we have every confidence in the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, the mediator who must establish the timetable and parameters for each stage of the negotiations, with the Council's support.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, almost everything has already been said. I will limit myself to calling on all the parties to ensure uninterrupted and unconditional access to the besieged areas of Syria. Tomorrow, at the request of New Zealand, Spain and Egypt, the World Food Programme and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will brief the Council in what will undoubtedly be a very important meeting. Our priority right now is preventing any future repeats of the situations in Madaya and Kefraya.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to inform all concerned that we will be continuing the open debate through the lunch hour, as we have a very large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Mr. Koenders (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands currently holds the Presidency of the European Union. Today, I will make a number of comments in my national capacity. A statement on behalf of the European Union (EU) will be delivered later.

I am extremely worried about the different crises in the Middle East. It sometimes seems that our common responsibility to protect and our obligations for the protection of civilians have been all but forgotten. International humanitarian law in countries is threatened every day like Yemen and Syria. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed. Millions have had to flee their homes. Entire populations are afraid of what tomorrow may bring. The Security Council has an enormous responsibility to help put an end to the violence. We owe it to the people. Peace cannot wait. It is long overdue.

The civil war in Syria is about to enter its sixth year. The numbers are staggering. Half the population has been displaced, and more than one out of one hundred Syrians has died, with the overwhelming majority killed by their own Government. Many people, who are internally displaced, flee to neighbouring countries. We all have a responsibility to ensure that people in Syria are able to live their lives free from violence, free from poverty and free from fear in their own homes, villages and countries. The Netherlands urges all parties involved to step up efforts to fully implement resolution 2254 (2015), which incorporates two elements: a political process with a calendar oriented towards transition and the fight against Daesh. Both elements are necessary and can strengthen each other.

We need to beat terrorism, boost freedom and prioritize the humanitarian needs of all Syrians. One must be accompanied by the other, and that is how the Dutch Government sees it. That is why we have to act intelligently against Daesh, whose ideology and actions against innocent men, women and children — Muslims, Christians and Yazidi — are abhorrent. The international coalition against Daesh consists of more than 60 countries. We are making progress on the battlefield, especially in Iraq, and in undercutting their financial resources and vicious narrative. But prevention is also key worldwide. We must do more to find solutions to the ongoing conflicts in the region by tackling the political and socioeconomic crises and root causes on which Daesh and other terrorist groups feed.

Thankfully, meaningful steps have been taken in recent months with regard to the political process as well. We have seen the establishment of the International Syria Support Group. We have also seen the opposition, to a large degree, joining ranks in Riyadh. Resolution 2254 (2015) provides a framework for transition in Syria — a necessary precondition for peace — and on 29 January talks will start that should ultimately lead to sustainable peace. I think that we should all do our utmost to convince the parties to engage fully and unequivocally, and we need to stand ready to help where we can. In that light, the Netherlands specifically supports a group of Syrian women who will play an advisory role in the talks. It is important for all of us

to put our money where our mouth is in implementing Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1325 (2000). In addition, we have been supporting the political process with training and capacity-building for the opposition groups involved in the talks and in supporting diplomacy.

We have deep respect for United Nations Special Envoy De Mistura and other partners who are working hard towards that end. I myself have worked as Special Representative, and I have often had the opportunity to brief the Council on other situations, including in Mali among other places. I can tell the Council how important it is for the Special Envoy to be not only encouraged but also supported by everybody. We have been substantially supporting De Mistura's team. We also commend Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov, whose efforts have shown that great differences can be overcome and Security Council members can effectively collaborate towards the same goal. Diplomacy can still work.

Because peace cannot wait, more needs to be done. We also need to step up our humanitarian efforts, assistance and sense of urgency to help the people inside Syria and those who are fleeing, making sure that they will be safe from the violence and deprivations that they suffer and have a home to go back to where they can live in peace and security. Countries such as Lebanon — represented here today — Jordan, Turkey and Iraq that host the majority of refugees deserve much more assistance. In that regard, we welcome the conference the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Kuwait and the United Nations will host in London on 4 February, where the Netherlands will pledge more humanitarian aid and structural support for Syrians in Syria and abroad.

The number one priority of the Council should be to find a lasting solution for Syria. It is not easy, but peace cannot wait. I call upon the Council to set aside its differences and pave the way for a solution that addresses the need for justice and accountability, because there can be no peace without justice.

We also urgently need peace between Israel and its neighbours. This has been a matter close to my heart ever since I worked in Gaza for three months in 1999. That was a time of cautious optimism. It was time when there was a ground-breaking ceremony for a Gaza harbour. Nothing has come of that and many other initiatives, and we all know why. The situation cannot go on like this. It has now been 23 years since the Oslo accords were signed, and despite the commendable efforts to negotiate a lasting peace agreement, peace remains elusive. Conditions on the ground have worsened. After decades of negotiations, a final status agreement seems further away than ever. Many have lost all hope. The latest escalation of violence illustrates just how volatile the situation is. For Israelis and Palestinians, peace cannot wait.

We cannot afford to look away as the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate. Innocent lives have been lost on both sides. I urge both sides to show maximum restraint. All responses must be proportionate and comply with international law. Violence against innocent civilians can never be justified. Let me reiterate our long-standing engagement in favour of a two-State solution, with an independent, democratic and viable State of Palestine and the State of Israel living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition, based on the borders of 1967. Preserving the viability of the two-State solution is crucial. For that to happen, I believe a new and transformative approach is needed, with three sets of actions.

First, we must create a more favourable climate for negotiations. That can be done by stopping violence, building confidence, including continued security cooperation, strengthening the Palestinian economy and improving conditions in Gaza. Both sides must refrain from steps and inflammatory rhetoric that undermine confidence and trigger further escalation. In that regard, it is critically important that Israel halts all settlement expansion. As the European Union has pointed out time and again, settlements are illegal under international law and a severe threat to the two-State solution. I deplore the planned authorization by the Israeli Government to confiscate 370 acres in the West Bank, south of Jericho.

Secondly, while commending the progress made in Palestinian State-building, I believe that it should be enhanced. The Palestinian Authority plays a vital role in keeping the prospect of the two-State solution alive. But it must be capable, accountable and responsive, and it must respond to extremist propaganda. Good governance, effective service delivery and pluralistic and inclusive Government, with space for dissenting views, will strengthen the legitimacy of Palestinian leadership. And it would be good if the Palestinian Authority could return to Gaza.

The third element builds on developments in the region. A new format for negotiations is needed, with

substantial roles for Arab partners and the European Union, alongside the United States, based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. I fully support efforts to create a new dynamic and welcome the work of Egypt, Morocco, Jordan and the League of Arab States in the context of the Arab Quartet. I favour a Security Council consensus as a basis for renewed final status negotiations, in which parameters for a peace accord could be incorporated. The Netherlands stands ready to assist where it can. It is close to both parties.

We have to find a compromise, and we are working on that together with our EU. In line with the European Union Council conclusions on Syria, we will work with all the relevant stakeholders towards a renewed multilateral approach to the peace process. We also fully support the European Union's reiterated offer to both parties of a package of European political, economic and security support, and of a special, privileged partnership with the European Union, which offers substantial benefits to both parties, in the event of a final peace agreement.

In the past, the Council has shown that it could and would unite against threats to international peace and stability. In the face of today's threats, the Council can prove to the world that it does not shy away from its collective responsibility, but rather that it will work together to advance the Middle East peace process and resolve the conflict in Syria once and for all. We, the world, and the people we represent need the leadership of the Council, because we cannot let peace wait.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Ziade (Lebanon) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

Allow me to start by congratulating the delegations of Uruguay, Egypt, Japan, Senegal and Ukraine for the beginning of their tenure as elected members of the Security Council. I would also like to commend your leadership, Sir, during your presidency of the Council, as well as the five outgoing delegations — Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria — for the excellent job done. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

At the end of 2015, while the world celebrated milestones that resulted in the culmination of certain efforts of international political will, from Sendai to New York and from Addis Ababa to Paris, the Middle East continued to struggle with yet another sombre and traumatizing year haunted by Israeli occupation, terrorism, conflicts, violence and violations of human rights. Indeed, the absence of collective political will is turning the land of faith and hope into the land of hatred and sorrow.

The year 2015 came to an end in my country with 1,168 Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty by land, air and sea. These are facts. No unfounded accusations or attempts to blame Lebanese parties will change them. Hard facts remain hard facts. A simple calculation proves that Israel commits an average of 3.2 violations against my country per day. All those violations have been communicated to the Council and circulated as official documents of the United Nations. They illustrate the systematic disregard by Israel of our collective will to advance the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

On 28 January 2015, the escalation along the Blue Line resulted in the killing of a Spanish soldier by Israel, and on 4 January 2016 Israel bombarded six Lebanese villages for one hour. These are just a few examples of unilateral actions taken by Israel, which undermine the work of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Lebanese Armed Forces, threaten their security and jeopardize efforts to maintain stability in the region. It is alarming that Israel not only refuses to abide by its obligations under resolution 1701 (2006), but that it continues to take unilateral and provocative actions in a show of blatant disrespect for the tripartite mechanism established by UNIFIL.

Despite the complex political situation in my country, my Government has reaffirmed time and again its unwavering support for the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) in its entirety. It also renewed its determination to continue combating terrorism and to address the social, economic and security impacts of the continuing flux of refugees from Syria. We clearly stated that the exodus of despair of the Syrian refugees should summon in all of us our shared values of humanity and the will to put on track a serious political process to end this protracted conflict. In that regard, Lebanon acknowledges the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) and looks forward to the upcoming Syria donors conference in London next month. That meeting should be an opportunity to reinvigorate international efforts

to share responsibilities with regard to the refugees and to alleviate their suffering and the burden on their host communities.

What can be said about the situation in the occupied territories of the State of Palestine in 2015? The Israeli reign of terror continues unabated. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded the highest number of casualties in October, with 51 killed and 7,027 injured Palestinians. Israeli authorities have been detaining more than 8,000 children since 2000, and prosecuting more than 700 children per year. That means that at least two generations of Palestinian youth do not know anything other than administrative detention and Israeli might. They deserve better choices. How many Palestinian generations must suffer from illegal Israeli practices — which in many cases result in extrajudicial execution — for the Security Council to act? For how long will this organ remain silent while the so-called self-proclaimed "only democracy" in the Middle East continues the demolition of houses, the seizure of Palestinian land — the latest being 370 acres in the West Bank — the intensification of settlement activities and the isolation measures that segregate people in East Jerusalem, denying them the exercise of their fundamental and inalienable rights? All of that is part of a clear and undeniable endeavour to render the two-State solution an unattainable objective.

The unravelling of this tragedy in the occupied State of Palestine requires immediate action by the international community to provide international protection to the Palestinian people. This tragedy should arouse within the Council the political will to establish a new, credible and comprehensive framework for negotiations, which should be conducted within a defined time frame and based on the well-known parameters set by the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular all Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Let us make 2016 the year of achievements and of the fulfilment of hopes and aspirations. Let us demonstrate to the peoples of the Middle East that they are neither forgotten nor left alone.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, I thank Minister Rodolfo Nin Novoa of Uruguay for having organized this important debate.

(*spoke in English*)

I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing, and I wish to acknowledge the interventions by the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

Earlier this month, the Security Council held an open debate (see S/PV.7606) on the protection of civilians — an issue that is, and must remain, central to this organ and to its discussions on the Middle East in particular. We all have been appalled by the abuses and deliberate attacks against civilians and civilian facilities in Gaza, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere. Such disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law is unacceptable and deserves our strongest condemnation. It is our duty to look after vulnerable populations in conflict zones and protect them, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

It is equally important, however, to care about those who have had to flee their home countries to survive war and persecution. We cannot turn our backs on them and allow racism and xenophobia to dictate policy choices and political narratives. As pointed out by former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, it remains a matter of great concern that refugees confront hostility in places where they had thought they would be safe and, worse still, they are made scapegoats for a number of existing problems, from criminality to economic hardship. The United Nations has a prominent responsibility in fostering tolerance and countering the spread of xenophobic and sectarian platforms. It is not only the credibility of the affected countries that is at stake, but the very credibility of the whole international community.

The year 2015 was an especially challenging one for the Middle East. The conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen deteriorated significantly, with serious implications for the region and beyond. While some progress has been achieved in Iraq, the security situation and the threat posed by Daesh and other terrorist groups continue to be of extreme concern.

For Israelis and Palestinians, 2015 was another year marked by heightened fear, increased violence and civilian casualties. Without any credible political horizon, the occupation of Palestine remained

unchanged, while tensions and illegal action, such as the expansion of Israeli settlement activities, continued. Simply put, the occupation must come to an end.

In spite of these unacceptable circumstances, the Security Council once again has not lived up to its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations. The request for international protection by President Mahmoud Abbas remains unanswered and a draft resolution aimed at the resumption of negotiations was sidelined. We reiterate our call on the Security Council to act swiftly and establish parameters to promptly reach a two-State solution. Brazil remains convinced that effective prospects for peace require the establishment of a Palestinian State that is sovereign, economically viable and territorially contiguous, living side by side with Israel in peace and security within internationally recognized borders based on the 1967 lines. Brazil welcomed the hoisting of the Palestinian flag at the United Nations during the opening of the seventieth session of the General Assembly as a necessary reminder that the two-State solution is long overdue.

We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) on Syria. After years of a brutal conflict that has claimed more than 250,000 lives, caused extensive destruction and wreaked havoc in the region, no effort should be spared to move forward a Syrian-led political process based on full respect for human rights and the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. Brazil encourages the parties to fully implement the road map set forth by resolution 2254 (2015), including by engaging in formal negotiations in good faith and establishing a nationwide ceasefire. We reaffirm our unwavering support for the work carried out by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, as well as to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry headed by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro.

Regardless of the establishment of a ceasefire, all attacks against the civilian population must cease, including the use of barrel bombs. Unhindered access to humanitarian assistance is non-negotiable. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has firmly stated, the deliberate starvation of the civilian population is a war crime. We applaud the work carried out by United Nations agencies to help millions of people in need and the generosity of countries in the region, including Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Egypt, which have been receiving the bulk of Syrian refugees. Brazil has contributed to these efforts by issuing close to 9,000 entry visas on a humanitarian basis for Syrian residents affected by the crisis and by providing food and medicine to the refugees and displaced people in the region.

The Brazilian Government expresses its deep consternation at the terrorist attacks in the Syrian city of Deir ez-Zour. Brazil condemns in the strongest terms any act of terrorism, religious intolerance and indiscriminate use of violence practised under any pretext against civilian populations.

In Yemen, the escalation of hostilities has further aggravated an already dire humanitarian situation. Widespread air strikes and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, as well as attacks on health-care facilities, schools and other essential infrastructure, have taken a heavy toll on civilians. We deeply regret that attempts to establish a durable ceasefire have failed once again. After one year of military intervention, no concrete progress has been achieved in moving a political process forward, while thousands of civilians have died and 80 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance.

Brazil calls on all parties to the conflict to immediately cease hostilities and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We reaffirm our firm support for the efforts of the Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed to bring the parties to the negotiating table and engage them in seeking a diplomatic solution without any further delay.

Finally, reinstating national unity in Libya remains a challenge, notwithstanding the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement facilitated by the United Nations. Brazil urges the parties to fully implement the Agreement and work together towards the establishment of a functional Government of national accord. This is a unique opportunity not to be missed to advance towards national reconciliation and the reconstruction of Libya.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Uruguayan presidency for having convened today's open debate on the Middle East and the Secretary-General for his briefing, which will compel Member States to act with a sense of extreme urgency and responsibility. If not addressed speedily, the current situation and developments could destabilize regional

and global security. In that regard, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the following points.

First, the devastating situation in Syria, which has spread beyond the region, is of great concern to the rest of the world. Kazakhstan will continue to support measures taken by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, the United Nations system, the League of Arab States and the International Syria Support Group. We call on the Syrian Government and opposition to speedily determine the political future of the country through dialogue, reconciliation and direct negotiations, which we hope will start later this week, to implement resolution 2254 (2015), as well as recommendations within the framework of the Geneva process. We think that it is necessary to address the grave humanitarian crisis, including the use of hunger as a weapon of war, in the Syrian Arab Republic and the mass exodus of its citizens. We also need to facilitate the work of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations.

Secondly, prevailing tensions in the Middle East are also concentrated primarily on the Palestinian issue. Kazakhstan is convinced that the conflict will ease only if the legitimate right to self-determination of the Palestinian people is recognized. My delegation therefore supports the creation of an independent State of Palestine, peacefully coexisting with Israel within the 1967 borders. We also promote Palestine's accession to full-fledged membership of the United Nations and welcome the raising of the Palestinian flag on United Nations grounds. We see the two-State solution as the only viable option for lasting peace and call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to demonstrate political commitment and goodwill to reach a historic peace agreement.

Thirdly, Kazakhstan is conscious of the tensions between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. We call on the leadership of those two brotherly countries, together with others in the region, to take the necessary measures to prevent a further escalation of sectarian tensions and thus speedily resume diplomatic relations.

Fourthly, with regard to Iran's nuclear programme, Kazakhstan has always supported the process of international negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran, and held two rounds of talks in 2013, in Almaty, that contributed to those negotiations. Kazakhstan is also actively participating in the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, inter alia, by supplying Iran with natural uranium as a part of the overall agreement.

Fifthly, given the situation of violent extremism, my delegation would like to present the proposal that President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan made at the General Assembly in September 2015 (see A/70/PV.13). It was his idea to establish a United Nations-led counter-terrorism coalition network with a unified mechanism to defeat this scourge and bring perpetrators and their supporters to justice. Such an entity will bring together and strengthen existing United Nations structures.

Kazakhstan also proposes that the current United Nations mechanisms, including the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, should be made legally binding for relevant Security Council resolutions. We suggest the speedy adoption of a comprehensive document on international terrorism, which has been a challenge for us during the last 20 years. We call on all delegations to support this bold and forward-looking approach and to effectively implement the Secretary-General's plans of action to prevent violent extremism. In that regard, my country has also proposed organizing a high-level debate in May under the patronage of the President of the General Assembly entitled, "Religions against terrorism" or "Religions for peace", with the aim of showing the strength of religious unity against the destructive nature of terrorism and violent extremism.

In addition, we are all aware that the activities of terrorist groups undermine the foundation of the existing world order far beyond the conflict zones in the Middle East. We are concerned about its spread to the Central Asian region, which Kazakhstan represents, and beyond, including, first of all, Afghanistan. In that context, we believe that it is necessary to tap into and mobilize the potential of regional structures like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia and others, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to maintain security and stability in this vast area.

The ever-increasing violence has caused the number of civilian victims to escalate, mainly women and children. It has also caused the forced migration of people from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe at an unprecedented scale. This uncontrollable

exodus is of great concern not only to the European Union but also to all of us, the United Nations and the international community. Therefore, we reiterate our robust commitment to ensuring peace in the Middle East based on freedom and justice for all.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): I thank the President for convening this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing.

In view of the time constraints, I would like to make a short statement; the full version thereof is being circulated.

Our position on the Middle East peace process has been consistent and clear. India supports a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Our continued commitment to the Palestinian cause and earnestness towards developing stronger bilateral relations are demonstrated in our successive high-level visits to Palestine in the recent past. The President of India visited Palestine on the first-ever State visit from India, in October 2015. The Indian External Affairs Minister visited Palestine this month and held discussions with the Palestinian leadership, including with President Abbas.

Our approach to Palestine has crystallized into a policy with three core dimensions, namely, first, solidarity with the Palestinian people; secondly, support for the Palestinian cause; and, thirdly, support for Palestine's nation-building and capacity-building efforts. India's empathy for the Palestinian cause and our friendship with the Palestinian people remain undiluted. This is an integral part of our foreign policy.

As part of our support for the nation-building efforts of Palestine, we have been consistently expanding technical and financial assistance to it. In addition, India annually contributes $1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and has pledged and contributed $4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza.

India remains firmly convinced that dialogue is the only viable option to effectively address the Palestinian issue. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon, for a comprehensive, just and lasting resolution of the issue.

In Yemen, we have been urging all the parties concerned to amicably resolve their differences and find a consensus-based solution. We express our deep concern about the activities of proscribed outfits and radicalized and extremist groups in the West Asia and Gulf region, especially in northern parts of Iraq and Syria, which are having a critical impact on peace and stability in the region. We believe that the consolidation of political processes and solutions while building durable State institutions will be the effective way to address such extremism and radicalism in the region.

Turning to Syria, we would like to express our continued concern at the ongoing violence in the country and the loss of human life. India has consistently called for a comprehensive political resolution of the conflict that brings all the parties to the negotiating table. It has to be a Syrian-led process and must take into account the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We maintain that there can be no military solution to the conflict.

We are encouraged by resolution 2254 (2015), adopted on 18 December 2015, which lays out a road map for a political solution of the Syrian conflict. We remain hopeful that United Nations mediation efforts will yield results.

The humanitarian situation in Syria and the neighbouring countries has to be addressed effectively. We have contributed $4 million as humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees and intend to participate and contribute in the forthcoming meeting on Syria scheduled to be held in London in February.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vrailas: European Union (EU) Foreign Ministers adopted conclusions on the Middle East peace process one week ago, on 18 January. I refer to those conclusions as the latest statement of EU policy on this issue.

The EU is deeply concerned that the continuing cycle of violence has led to a serious loss of human life in Israel and the Palestinian territory in recent months. We firmly condemn the terror attacks and violence from all sides and in all circumstances. The EU urges all parties to refrain from any action that would worsen the situation by way of incitement or provocation. We commend both sides for upholding security coordination. We welcome progress on the Duma investigation and call for Israel to hold all perpetrators of settler violence to account. The EU also calls on both sides to jointly and resolutely fight incitement and hate speech.

Only the re-establishment of a political horizon and the resumption of dialogue can stop the violence. Security measures alone cannot stop the cycle of violence. The underlying causes of the conflict need to be addressed. The EU reaffirms its support for the Quartet calls for the taking of significant transformative steps in order to restore confidence and rebuild trust. We urge both sides to implement such measures at the earliest possible juncture. A fundamental change of policy by Israel with regard to the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Area C, will significantly increase economic opportunities, empower Palestinian institutions and enhance stability and security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The EU is united in its commitment to achieving a two-State solution based on parameters set out in the Council conclusions of July 2014. We strongly oppose all actions that undermine the viability of the two-State solution and urge both sides to demonstrate a genuine commitment to such a solution in order to rebuild trust and create a path back to meaningful negotiations.

Securing a just and lasting peace, ending all claims, will require an increased common international effort. The EU will work actively with all relevant stakeholders towards a renewed multilateral approach to the peace process. The establishment of an International Support Group and a further international conference are both possible ways to contribute to that end. The EU recalls its willingness to engage further with regional partners on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law by States and non-State actors, including accountability, is a cornerstone of peace and security in the region. We call for the protection of children, highlight the importance for the work of civil society to go unhindered, both in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and follow recent developments in this regard with concern.

Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. The EU reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in that context. We urge Israel to end all settlement activity and to dismantle the outposts erected since March 2001. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

The EU and its member States are committed to ensuring the continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. The EU expresses its commitment to ensuring that, in line with international law, all agreements between the State of Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. This does not constitute a boycott of Israel, which the EU strongly opposes.

The EU urges all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process. The EU will continue its support for Palestinian aspirations to statehood. The positive results of the past must not be lost, and Palestinian institutions must continue to grow stronger, more transparent, more accountable and more democratic. The EU calls upon the Government to work towards genuine and democratic elections for all Palestinians.

The EU calls on all parties to take swift steps to produce a fundamental change to the political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, including the end of the closure and a full opening of the crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. Recent rocket fire by militant groups is unacceptable and underlines again the danger of escalation. All stakeholders must commit to non-violence and peace. We urge the Palestinian sides to make the reconstruction of Gaza an overarching national priority. The Palestinian Authority must fully resume its governmental functions in Gaza.

We welcome the steps that Israel has taken to ease some restrictions on Gaza. However the lifting of restrictions on the movement of people, services and goods — particularly those designated as dual-use items — is needed to allow reconstruction efforts and basic service delivery. We call on all parties to

guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza. The EU remains ready to engage with the parties and relevant stakeholders towards resolving the situation.

The EU reiterates its offer to both parties of a package of European political, economic and security support and of a special privileged partnership with the EU in the event of a final peace agreement. The future development of relations between the EU and both the Israeli and Palestinian partners will also depend on their engagement towards a lasting peace based on a two-State solution.

The war continues to rage in Syria, with disastrous consequences for the Syrian population. People suffering and dying in Madaya, Deir ez-Zour, Fu'ah, Kafraya and elsewhere show us the cynicism of using starvation as means of warfare. Unconditional access to Madaya and all other besieged areas is an absolute prerequisite for alleviating the humanitarian suffering. The bombings and targeting of civilian areas and structures like hospitals and schools are unacceptable. The EU calls on all parties to cease all attacks and bombings of civilian targets, take all appropriate steps to protect civilians — including members of ethnic, religious and confessional communities — put an end to sieges of civilian areas, fully respect international humanitarian law and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, also recalling that the primary responsibility to protect its population lies with the Syrian regime.

It is urgent to halt the conflict in Syria. In this context, the EU fully supports the work done by the International Syria Support Group, in which it is an active participant, and urges all parties to continue their efforts in view of a credible and inclusive transition process. Some progress has been made in the fight against Daesh in Iraq. However, the terrorist group cannot be fully defeated if the civil war in Syria continues. Daesh bases its own survival and its propaganda on sectarian strife and chaos in Syria and in Iraq. The EU calls for the immediate implementation of concrete confidence-building measures in support of the upcoming intra-Syrian political talks, the release of political prisoners and an end to attacks on civilians, aerial bombardments and sieges of civilian areas.

The European Union supports the goal of resolution 2254 (2015) to bring together the broadest possible spectrum of the opposition, chosen by Syrians, who will decide their negotiation representatives and define their negotiation positions so as to enable the political process to begin. The EU commends, in this regard, the work that is being done by Saudi Arabia and other States to reach out to the Syrian opposition in preparation for the first round of talks, and commends the opposition's continued commitment to negotiating. The EU calls on all the Syrian parties to adopt a constructive and flexible attitude with a view to the timely start of an inclusive and credible political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and to fully commit to the political talks in order to come to an agreement on the political transition in Syria.

The EU fully supports United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura. The EU and its member States will provide support to the intra-Syrian talks and the entire Syrian-led transition process in terms of mediation, expertise and consensus-building. We will maintain close contact with the Envoy's team to define ways in which we can support a ceasefire and, once a ceasefire is in place, how we can step up our aid to the Syrian people. This also includes local governance needs, rehabilitation and the reconstruction of the country. The EU will continue to encourage the meaningful participation of women in the United Nations-facilitated political process for Syria.

As Council members know, the EU is the biggest donor to the Syrian crisis. We have already committed to providing substantial support to Turkey and are putting together comprehensive support packages for Jordan and Lebanon. In addition, we need to step up humanitarian and stabilisation aid inside Syria.

The implementation day of the agreement on the Iranian nuclear programme demonstrates that diplomacy and multilateralism deliver effective results for peace and security. It shows that cooperation can prevail over confrontation. The EU is committed to continuing its active engagement in the International Syria Support Group and in the Global Coalition to counter ISIL/Daesh.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): The Pakistan delegation welcomes this timely debate on the Middle East. We thank the Secretary-General for his incisive briefing to the Council.

The Middle East, the cradle of civilization, is today the centre of conflict, terrorism and massive human suffering. The causes are both current and historical. During a half-century of occupation, Palestine has been

repeatedly promised statehood, but as we know these promises never materialized, which set the stage for its prolonged agony and tragedy. The political injustices and human suffering of the Palestinian people have progressively intensified.

The fires that have been ignited across the region in recent years in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and beyond cannot eclipse the Palestine question or render a solution for its enduring tragedy less urgent or essential. The plight of the Palestinian people is one of the core causes of the rise and spread of popular anger and alienation across the Arab and Muslim world. Extremist ideologies and violent groups in the Middle East will be difficult to defeat until the essence of their narrative — the injustices against Muslim people, especially the Palestinians — is justly and effectively addressed.

Recent events have reinforced the conclusion that there will be no peace or stability in the holy land unless Israel accommodates an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds as its capital. Unfortunately, Israel has adopted a totally inflexible policy, including the continued taking of more and more Palestinian land for illegal settlements. That is increasingly rendering a two-State solution more and more difficult to achieve. We share the Secretary-General's profound concern at the reports of Israel's authorization of the largest land grab in over a year. The Security Council must mobilize the political will to ensure the implementation of its own binding resolutions requiring Israel's withdrawal from occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to a sovereign and secure Palestinian State. Israeli leaders should realize that a continued conflict in the occupied territories with the Palestinians will eventually erode the very nature of their State, and the war within will not remain unconnected with the wars raging just across Israel's imposed frontiers.

The wider wars across the region, while rooted in divisions that span centuries, have been ignited by more recent foreign interventions in Iraq and elsewhere. The foundations of the old order in the region have been eroded, giving way to disorder, spread by State and non-State actors, such as Daesh, or Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). ISIS has emerged as a rogue threat to the entire region and the world. It must be confronted, and it must be defeated. In order to succeed in that, the States of the region must, with the international community's assistance, reach the political decisions needed to end the civil war and suffering in Syria and build a path to peace that is responsive to the aspiration of its people and achieve an inclusive structure for governance. There is a need to accommodate the rights and interests of all religious and ethnic groups and halt the fighting in Yemen and rebuild that impoverished and broken country.

As is evident, that will be no easy endeavour. Success requires, first and foremost, an end to the regional hostility and rivalry that is polarizing the Middle East. The new and revived tensions are toxic, not only for the countries already engulfed in the conflict. It could encompass other regional States, home to diverse denominations of Islam and other religions. My country, Pakistan, is making its own modest contribution to promoting harmony in the region, as illustrated by the recent mediatory mission undertaken by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Riyadh and Teheran. Pakistan supports the United Nations processes for Syria and Yemen. We are encouraged that all the major regional and global Powers remain committed to supporting those processes. We believe that the delay in reconvening the Syria talks does not imply their collapse. We also hope that the United Nations-sponsored reconciliation will be realized in Yemen.

Pakistan believes that a stable order should emerge from the present chaos in West Asia and the Levant. To that end, a consistent dialogue is essential between all the regional States for the support of the major Powers. Such a dialogue can be promoted under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. It can help to promote fair and durable solutions to the conflicts and disputes in the region, and build consensus on collective counter-terrorism actions based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the divinely ordained unity of the world's Muslims, the *ummah*.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Anshor (Indonesia): Let me begin by joining previous speakers in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Rodolfo Nin Novoa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, and thanking the presidency of Uruguay for convening this open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing.

Indonesia associates itself with the statements to be delivered by the representatives of Iran and Kuwait

on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

I will focus my statement on the question of Palestine and the conflict in Syria, with emphasis on developments in 2015 in those areas and the actions that must be taken to achieve workable solutions.

The year 2015 was another depressing one for the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory. Intimidations, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and violence perpetrated against them by the Israeli forces and settlers occurred on almost a daily basis. The spiralling violence has only deepened the enmity between the Palestinian and Israeli communities. Provocative actions continue to occur and further complicate the prospect for restarting the peace process. Furthermore, violence in the occupied Palestinian territory has had inevitable repercussions on the stability of the Middle East. The dangerous situation on the ground is also being exploited by extremists to justify their cause. Despite those alarming developments, the Security Council has not been able to respond decisively.

Indonesia is consistent in its strong condemnation of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In our view, the occupation is nothing but a betrayal of the principles of justice and the self-determination of people, which are the very principles on which this Organization was founded and which it was intended to defend. Moreover, the longer the occupation is in place, the more violence the world is likely to see. Let me reiterate, therefore, Indonesia's unwavering position on the question of Palestine. The Israeli occupation must end without further delay. The Security Council must uphold its Charter responsibility and work in earnest and with stronger determination to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement based on the various relevant United Nations resolutions.

It is high time to give peace a chance and to stop actions that will further jeopardize the efforts to restart the peace process. Pending the attainment of a final solution, Israel must comply with its international obligations as the occupying Power. The most important among them are the protection of the Palestinian people and stopping the violence and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms that are being perpetrated against them.

In December 2015, my Government hosted the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem. At the Conference, participants reaffirmed, among other things, their opposition to Israel's illegal actions and the imperative to strengthen people-to-people relations among Palestinians and Israelis. That is because the spirit of coexistence is a critical foundation in any meaningful peace process.

Let me now turn to the catastrophe in Syria, which has lasted for almost five years. The consequences of the conflict in Syria are extremely horrendous, with ramifications that go beyond the national boundaries of Syria and the region of Middle East. Again, I would like to emphasize Indonesia's call to end violence and to allow the immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to all victims. Indonesia is also mindful that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or Daesh, continues to take advantage of the conflict in Syria. In that regard, we are of the view that combatting ISIL should serve as a unifying drive for all parties in the pursuit of peace in Syria.

Indonesia remains convinced that the conflict in Syria can only be settled through an inclusive political process involving all Syrians. We welcome the convening of meetings in Vienna last month and the plan to hold peace talks in Geneva this week. We hope that all parties can set aside their differences and take advantage of this rare opportunity to find a political solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Israeli occupation of the Arab territories and its severe consequences have negatively affected the security and stability of the region. The situation is extremely dangerous, given the deliberate international failure to compel Israel to put an end to its occupation of Arab occupied territories and to its severe violations of international instruments.

In spite of hundreds of United Nations resolutions calling on Israel to end its occupation of all occupied Arab territories within the borders of 4 June 1967, Israel, regrettably, has not responded or ended its occupation. On the contrary, the situation has further deteriorated due to Israel's ongoing occupation and its hostile and repressive practices against the Palestinian people, as well as its settlement activities in violation of international humanitarian law, international law and human rights law. Those crimes constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It has become clear that the impunity extended by certain members of the Security Council to Israel has encouraged it to continue its practices, aggressions and violations. The situation is extremely alarming and threatens to explode and further undermine the fragile attempts to achieve peace in the region. Nevertheless, there are still those in the Council who deny the Palestinians even their most basic rights, including the right to establish their own State in their homeland. Some even insist on not addressing the current developments in Palestine in their real context and instead attempt to view the situation in terms of reciprocal violence that should be stopped. In so doing, they ignore the crux of the conflict, which is the occupation and its consequences, including settlement activity, forced displacement and other Israeli practices. The Security Council must put an end to the Israeli violations in order to protect the Palestinian people, in accordance with its duties under the Charter of the United Nations.

In addition to the barbaric Israeli policy that I have just mentioned, Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan since 1967 and imposed a bitter reality on the Syrian citizens suffering under occupation, which, in accordance with international law, should be immediately ceased. The United Nations must assume its responsibility to address that reality as seriously as it deserves to be dealt with and to work for the implementation of its relevant resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981). Israel should be obliged to put an end to its systematic and severe violations of human rights, settlement policy, confiscation of land, intimidation, suppression and oppression, racial discrimination and social isolation, as well as the plundering of the natural resources of the Golan, such as water, oil and natural gas, in addition to its policy of indiscriminate arrest of Syrian citizens.

In that regard, Syria reiterates its urgent call on the Secretary-General and the Security Council to make the necessary humanitarian efforts to require Israel to immediately release all Syrian prisoners without conditions. Foremost among those prisoners is the Mandela of Syria, the freedom fighter Sedqi Al-Maqet, who — despite having already spent 27 years in Israeli prisons — was re-arrested by occupation forces last February for no crime other than working to show the links between the Israeli occupation forces and the armed terrorist groups and the Israeli occupation forces' unlimited support for those groups in the disengagement zone in the Syrian Golan. Like Sedqi Al-Maqet, Bashira Mahmoud is a prisoner accused of no crime other than being Syrian and rejecting Israeli citizenship, like all the other sons of the occupied Syrian Golan.

During the current crisis in Syria, Israel has opened a new chapter in its book of violations through its unbridled support for terrorists in the disengagement zone in the Syrian Golan by providing them with firepower and by treating the injured in Israeli hospitals. Israel thereby violates the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974 and exposes the safety and lives of the personnel of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force to danger.

In conclusion, I condemn in the strongest terms any attempt to defend Israel, cover up its crimes or introduce new issues before the Security Council that are unrelated to the situation in the Middle East and the crux of that issue, which is putting an end to the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories and granting Palestine its inalienable right to self-determination and the establishment of its own State on its homeland. Every time Israel commits an aggression against the Palestinian people, certain delegations make misleading and incendiary statements about Syria with a view to distracting attention from the crimes of Israel and to diminishing the international pressure on it. For that reason and although there is a great deal that Syria could refute, I will not respond to the empty claims made by the delegations of States that support, harbour and arm terrorists, spread extremism and sabotage in Syria and do their utmost to undermine the attempts to reach a peaceful settlement to the crisis in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the Holy See.

Monsignor Kassas (Holy See) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Holy See commends the presidency of Uruguay for bringing the topic of the Middle East to the attention of the international community through this Security Council open debate.

My delegation wishes to address first the stalled peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. With the lack of substantive negotiations taking place, acts of violence continue to spiral, leading many to doubt seriously the continued validity of the Oslo accords.

The Holy See believes that the peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians can move forward only through direct negotiations between the parties,

with the strong support of the international community. That will require courageous decisions by both parties and demands fair mutual concessions. But there is no alternative, if both Israel and Palestine are to enjoy security, prosperity and peaceful coexistence side by side with internationally recognized borders. Both peoples have suffered too long from the misguided view that force alone can resolve their differences. Only sustained negotiations, entered into in good faith, will resolve their differences and bring peace to the peoples of Israel and Palestine.

Pope Francis, in his 11 January address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, spoke of the failure to advance the peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians. He expressed the hope that the new year

> "can heal the deep wounds dividing Israelis and Palestinians, and enable the peaceful coexistence of two peoples who — of this I am sure — in the depth of their hearts ask only for peace".

Acts of violence and inflammatory rhetoric must be set aside in favour of the voices of dialogue to give both peoples the peace to which their hearts aspire.

The Comprehensive Agreement signed between the Holy See and the State of Palestine on 26 June 2015 entered into force on 2 January 2016. It basically concerns the life and activity of the Church in Palestine. In the complex reality of the Middle East, where Christians have suffered persecution in some countries, the Holy See hopes that the Agreement will serve as an example of dialogue and cooperation, in particular for other Arab and Muslim majority countries.

The nearly five-year conflict in Syria rages on. It is more than just a conflict between Syrians; foreign fighters from all over the globe continue to commit unspeakable acts of horror against the civilian population in Syria and in parts of Iraq. The influence of those foreign elements on Syrian territory has led to sectarian violence and persecutions of religious and ethnic minorities, in particular the ancient Christian communities of the region. Pope Francis, calling on the international community, expressed his conviction that only joint and agreed political action can impede the spread of extremism and fundamentalism that spawn terrorist acts, which reap countless victims not only in Syria and Libya, but in other countries of the region.

My delegation will not repeat the litany of horrendous acts of violence against the people of Syria already outlined by various delegations. We would rather reiterate our appeal to all those concerned to stop the flow of arms into the region and intensify humanitarian action in order to give the desperate refugees and all the displaced the wherewithal to remain in their country, or as near as possible to their homeland, with adequate food, medical supplies, water, electricity, access to education for the young, and the elements necessary to a stable and secure life in their own homeland.

We support resolution 2254 (2015), in which the Security Council calls for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and for a political settlement to the conflict in Syria. The Holy See looks forward to the talks scheduled to begin in Geneva later this week. In spite of the many strong differences still to be found among the parties to the talks, the Holy See believes that the negotiations represent the best chance the international community has to bring stable and lasting peace in to Syria and the region. The Holy See also looks forward to the fourth humanitarian conference on Syria scheduled for 4 February and hopes that it will ease the suffering of the peoples of the region and contribute to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and to convey the Movement's appreciation to the Uruguayan presidency for convening this open debate at this critical juncture for the Palestinian people and the Middle East. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing.

We regret that the Palestinian people have begun yet another year under Israel's belligerent occupation. We are fast approaching the forty-ninth year of that illegal and brutal occupation, which is causing so much suffering for Palestinian civilians, further inflaming tensions and provoking more anger and frustration, with far-reaching and serious consequences for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond. The dangerous prevailing circumstances reaffirm that this issue must remain a priority for the Security Council, in line with its duties outlined in the Charter of the United Nations. Action is urgently required to halt the deterioration, protect the Palestinian civilian population and salvage the prospects for peace.

Yet the Security Council continues to be paralysed and, since the international community fails to hold Israel accountable, the situation in the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate as a result of Israel's crimes and violations. NAM once again urges the international community, particularly the Security Council, to take a decisive and historic step towards ending the occupation of the Palestinian land and paving the ground for the Palestinian people to exercise their right to independence and for a just and peaceful settlement to the conflict. The status quo is unsustainable and we cannot accept another year of stagnation in the political process and the continued suffering and hopelessness in the lives of an entire people.

Reflecting on the current period, NAM deplores the depraved killing and injuring of so many innocent civilians, which have inflicted so much loss and grief on Palestinian families, as well as the occupying Power's continued demolition of Palestinian homes and seizure of land, depriving Palestinians of their property and shelter. Such acts of collective punishment constitute blatant breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Moreover, the humanitarian disaster deliberately inflicted on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip by the occupying Power remains without redress. Since the Israeli military aggression in the summer of 2014, nearly 100,000 Palestinians remain displaced and homeless as the illegal Israeli blockade continues to obstruct the reconstruction of thousands of damaged and destroyed homes, and socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate as Gaza continues to be suffocated by the blockade and isolated from the rest of Palestine and the entire world. The situation of young people in Gaza is especially critical as they have no hope or opportunity, with over 63 per cent youth unemployment, as reported by the World Bank, with all of the attendant social, economic and psychological consequences.

The Security Council must also act to address Israel's ongoing illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in line with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Council's own resolutions. How can the Council remain silent as Israel deliberately and systematically continues its settlement activities, wall construction and confiscation and de facto annexation of Palestinian land, including its most recent announced intention to declare 370 acres in the West Bank as so-called State land, which has been globally condemned as violating international law?

Those and other systematic violations — including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious sites, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied East Jerusalem — have persisted unabated, worsening the extremely fragile situation on the ground, and must be addressed immediately and seriously to avert further destabilization and salvage the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders. It is unacceptable that Israeli impunity should persist without consequence. There can be no justification for such criminality. The time is past due to act in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and our moral responsibilities towards the question of Palestine.

The NAM position vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as reflected in its summit and ministerial declarations over the decades, is crystal clear. It is high time to end the abhorrent Israeli occupation and impunity that have brought too much suffering, caused so many crises and so much instability and anger throughout the Middle East, and continues to undermine regional and global peace and security. We call upon the Security Council to act in accordance with its duties under the Charter of the United Nations, its resolutions and the applicable provisions of international law that provide a solution to the conflict.

At a time when the Palestinian people are facing rising Israeli aggression and rapidly declining hope in the possibility of peace and justice, the Non-Aligned Movement seizes this opportunity to reaffirm its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people, recognizing their decades of resilience despite so much suffering and injustice, and reiterates its support for the realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as for a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Lebanon continues to suffer from consecutive Israeli violations of its borders and incursions against its territory, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel continues to violate Lebanese air space, intensifying its incursions

over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, the Movement condemns all measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Let me add a few words in response to the basest of allegations by the representative of Israel against my Government. Those allegations were made by the representative of a regime that has been the major root cause of instability in the region for more than six decades. It is a regime that, through its onoing policy of occupation and its criminal policies and practices in the occupied territories, has always been a major root cause that has driven people towards violent extremism. It is also ironic that a regime that threatens its neighbours and remains the only obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East should call on the Council to be brave and vigilant concerning Iran's nuclear programme. That is nothing other than a new line of sabotage that Israel has undertaken following the resounding defeat of its all-out attempts to derail the talks between Iran and the P5+1 on a nuclear deal.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and for his tireless efforts to bring about a resolution to the situation in the Middle East, including on the question of Palestine.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

South Africa has been actively involved in the Middle East in order to contribute to a lasting peace in the region and attaches great importance to this open debate. South Africa is nevertheless concerned that nothing substantive has been achieved, to our collective shame, which is witnessing the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people. Yet, we would all agree that the current status quo is undesirable.

As we have done in the past, today we will again declare our commitment to the two-State solution and reiterate that an essential part of achieving peace in the entire Middle East is through the establishment of a free and sovereign Palestinian State, coexisting side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel, based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We will also agree that this can be achieved only through genuine substantive negotiations among all the affected parties.

However, our action, or rather lack of action, will expose our words and commitments as hollow because nothing has been done to encourage and move the parties towards restarting the long-stalled negotiations or to prepare the ground for the difficult way forward on negotiating final status issues. It should concern us all that while we are vacillating, the situation on the ground grows worse by the day because of continued acts of violence against Palestinians and Israelis alike, including ongoing settlement activity and the high rate of demolitions of Palestinian structures.

In that context, South Africa deplores the recent announcement by the Government of Israel, declaring 370 acres in the West Bank, South of Jericho, to be so-called State land. Like the Secretary-General, we are concerned that should that decision be implemented, it would constitute the largest land appropriation by Israel in the West Bank since August 2014. Such actions not only undermine the viability of a two-State solution, but also hinder the Palestinian Authority's ability to expand its economic activity, which in turn undermines political stability and security in Palestine, which will eventually impact the security of Israel.

The events in the occupied Palestinian territory over the past months have heightened the urgent need to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As the Council may recall, numerous concerns have been raised regarding illegal Israeli actions aimed at altering the demographic composition and geographical reality of establishing a contiguous State. The Palestinian people continue to experience injustices, and cases where settlers have burned an entire Palestinian family alive are completely unacceptable and demand our condemnation. Acts of violence are also not condonable

in whatever form and by whomever they are committed. In that context, we appeal to all the parties involved to cease the violence and to take a peaceful path that ensures that innocent lives are not lost. My delegation considers the international protection of the Palestinian people essential, as they are a people at the mercy of an occupying Power.

In conclusion, South Africa welcomes the announcement by the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran has complied with its side of the 2015 accord. We also express our support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to convene intra-Syrian negotiations on the 29 January. It is our hope that the process will lead to a new horizon for the country and bring an end to the terrible conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Hahn (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Madam, for convening this year's first quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East.

The situation in the Middle East has tremendous impact beyond the region. Millions of refugees from Syria, Yemen and Iraq are moving towards Europe and other areas. Violent extremism is expanding globally. The international community must make a more concerted effort than ever to prevent conflicts in the region. In that vein, we strongly support the plan of action to prevent violent extremism, initiated by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, as a useful global framework to prevent that dangerous parasite from taking root and destroying the region and beyond. We also hope that the beginning of the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in Iran on 16 January will serve as a catalyst for a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East, based on denuclearization.

This year, the vicious cycle of attacks and retaliation between the Palestinians and Israelis has again continued to be a serious concern for the international community. Furthermore, there have been no signs of any serious effort to work for peace among the opposing parties. We once again urge the leaders of both Israel and Palestine to keep in mind that hostilities and violence not only mar the present, they also undermine the future, by driving young people deeper into desperation and hopelessness. We urge all the parties to put an end to violence and return to the negotiating table in order to work out a viable framework for achieving a two-State solution. Confidence-building measures, including ending the expansion of settlements in the occupied territories, are urgently needed if we are to create an environment more conducive to dialogue for sustainable peace between the parties.

Turning to Syria, we welcome the announcement of the start of an intra-Syrian dialogue on 29 January, and appreciate the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, to get this moving with unwavering commitment to resolution 2254 (2015). As the resolution makes clear, the dialogue must be an inclusive and Syrian-led political process. At the same time, all the parties must prepare for a nationwide ceasefire so that it can go into effect as soon as the political process begins. We must never again allow religious and national antagonisms and tensions in the region to paralyse international efforts to end the Syrian conflict. The already indescribable suffering of the Syrian people worsens every minute. Unhindered and unconditional humanitarian access must be ensured and international humanitarian law observed by all parties. The Republic of Korea will continue to join in the international efforts to end the suffering. In that regard, we will announce our 2016 humanitarian assistance plan for Syria and its neighbours at the conference to be held in London on 4 February.

In Yemen, it is urgent that we convene another round of peace talks as soon as possible. We urge the key players in the region to refrain from any activities that could fuel the conflict, and to cooperate with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in working to bring the warring parties back to the negotiating table.

The Middle East must remain an epicentre of instability no longer. We must spare no effort this year to open a new chapter of sustainable peace and collective prosperity in the region's history. The Republic of Korea will continue to support the efforts of the international community and the Security Council to create peace and stability in the region and to play a constructive role to that end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to congratulate you, Madam President, on Uruguay's presidency of the Security Council this month, and to commend your initiative in convening

today's important debate on the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. The ministerial level of the meeting emphasizes your keen interest in the subject and the urgency with which it should be treated. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the entire region, including Palestine.

Today's meeting comes at the end of yet another year of failure, particularly with regard to the question of Palestine, where the situation is worsening every day at the expense of the Palestinians, who aspire to peace and a better tomorrow in which their dreams — of an independent State within the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital — can come true. Yet despite the 24 years that have passed since the negotiations first began, there has been no peace settlement between Palestine and Israel, leading to despair among Palestinians. The Kingdom of Morocco, under His Majesty Mohammed VI, attaches special importance to Palestine, particularly Jerusalem, and to the importance, as has been established through international resolutions, of ending the Judaization of the country and the acts of aggression against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as an integral part of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Such acts do not serve the interests of peace and security in the region and can only fuel the hatred that in turn breeds the terrorism that affects us all.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People afforded His Majesty another opportunity to affirm the importance and necessity of ensuring that Palestinians can enjoy their inalienable rights, including above all their right to a sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital; a viable State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, as established in international resolutions. His Majesty reiterated that the ongoing lack of seriousness in addressing the urgent issue of Jerusalem and its continuing Judaization would have terrible consequences. The leaders of the Al-Quds Committee, he said, continued to demand that Jerusalem be spared all acts of aggression and attempts to alter its identity, and would stand in unwavering solidarity with their Palestinian brethren. The Palestinians, he went on, must be allowed to live in dignity, free from violence or acts of aggression against the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, so that it can remain the symbol it has always been of peace and coexistence between civilizations and cultures. The situation in the occupied territories, he said, required a swift response if the needs of the Palestinian people were to be met, including supplying the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East with all the resources it needs to enable it to continue providing basic services to the Palestinians.

He also called for support for the efforts of the Palestinian National Authority, and reiterated his full support for the Authority under the leadership of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. In that regard, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Morocco paid a successful visit to Palestine in November in order to set up a joint committee for cooperation between our two States, designed to address all mutually beneficial issues, particularly in the services and health sectors.

A peace process is the only way to settle this conflict; it will come not through war and the loss of innocent lives but through negotiations conducted in good faith, within clear parameters, with the goal of achieving a solution with two States living side by side in peace, security and cooperation. Morocco retains the firm position that the issue rests on the provisions of the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles of a sustainable peace, achieved with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State based on the June 1967 borders. It is therefore more incumbent than ever on the international community to work to mobilize the peace process within an established time frame, and Morocco is ready and willing to participate in every initiative aimed at achieving the goal of peace and security in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Uruguay and its Foreign Minister for its successful stewardship and energetic spirit with which the entire Uruguayan team is leading the work of the Security Council. I wish to convey special congratulations to my friend, Cristina.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, as well as with the statement to be made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The year 2016 may be a new year, but the same unjust, inhumane and unacceptable situation continues

for the Palestinian people, who continue to be the victims of an occupation that triggered the massive Palestinian exodus of 1948. Today, there are over 5.5 million Palestinian refugees, representing the greatest refugee crisis in the world, characterized by enormous suffering, desperation and uncertainty. Seventy years have passed since we committed to world peace and signed the Charter of the United Nations. However, unfortunately, today there are still Member States that continue to tolerate and protect that illegal and brutal occupation on the part of Israel. For nearly 70 years, this organ has allowed bombings, attacks, invasions and the Israeli occupation. I ask the members of the Council how much longer that will continue.

The Security Council has been unable to protect the Palestinian population, thereby manifesting a complete disdain for Palestinian suffering and a double standard as compared to other situations with which we are all familiar. It is shameful that, at this point, Palestine continues to face a criminal economic blockade that continues to suffocate its people and to condemn them to live in subhuman and extreme conditions, where there is no respect for their rights and where the population is deprived of its basic needs, such as health care, education and adequate housing with a roof over their heads.

On its seventieth anniversary, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (General Assembly resolution 70/1), which is an effort to eradicate miserly and poverty and to create decent conditions for the common welfare of all peoples. We ask ourselves, however: Will it be possible for the Palestinian people to exercise the same right to development? What is more, we continue to wonder whether they will be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without their being afforded the political space currently occupied by Israel. What indicators will this people have to gauge the fulfilment of those targets? The answer is clear: the Palestinian economy is an economy shaped by the occupation, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which infiltrates all aspects of the Palestinian people's lives, including, inter alia, the illegal occupation of their land and natural resources, the denial of their right to free movement and the return of their refugees, the detainment of their citizens and the daily destruction of their infrastructure.

We regret to have to meet again in this debate. Instead of celebrating the seventieth anniversary of our Organization with a free Palestine as a full-fledged State Member seated alongside us, the year 2015 left us with thousands of dead, wounded and displaced persons and destroyed homes. The prevailing situation in East Jerusalem is more precarious with every passing day.

The Security Council must demand that Israel completely end its occupation of Palestine and all Arab territories, lift the criminal blockade of Gaza and release all political prisoners and detainees, with whom we are in full solidarity. Our Government calls for the United Nations to fulfil its historical responsibilities by urgently adopting a resolution that includes a definitive time frame for the creation of the State of Palestine, respecting the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and living side-by-side with Israel, thereby laying the foundation for a just and lasting peace in the region, which is the only solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In conclusion, we reiterate the need for dialogue and negotiation, as opposed to the imposition of war, foreign intervention and regime change in all of the conflicts in the Middle East, including the situation in all of the occupied Arab territories, such as Syria and others, while taking into account the legitimate interests of all States and peoples of the region without foreign interference.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Mr. Sandoval Cojulún (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation welcomes the comprehensive briefing provided by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and acknowledges the presence in this debate of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, Mr. Rodolfo Nin Novoa, and that of other Ministers and Deputy Ministers who are here with us at this very important debate.

We align ourselves with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The dangerous escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians we are currently witnessing and the tragic loss of human life are truly unacceptable. Recent events, such as the two attacks on women in Jerusalem and in the West Bank, must not happen again. We call on the Israeli and Palestinian authorities to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. Those incidents only highlight the urgent need to work together in order to reduce the spiral of violence and attacks against the civilian population. We view

accountability for those who commit crimes on both sides as important. We welcome the fact that the Israeli police and Shin Bet have confirmed the arrest of several young Jewish radicals who had been accused of burning alive a Palestinian family while asleep in their home in the northern part of the West Bank. We call on the parties to promote peace and refrain from making statements that could incite additional violence and reprisals.

As we have reiterated on previous occasions, the building of settlements is illegal, constitutes a violation of international law and must not continue. We are concerned about Israeli plans to expand settlements. We believe that such an act clearly stands in the way of achieving a two-State solution, with those two States living peacefully side-by-side. It is important to underscore the fact that, in accordance with international humanitarian law, Israel is responsible for meeting the needs of the Palestinians living under occupation and must facilitate humanitarian assistance, not obstruct it.

In that regard, we are concerned about the Israeli initiative that could restrict the activities of human rights organizations. Such is the case with the transparency law, which would require non-governmental organizations that receive over half of their funds from foreign Governments to expressly declare such funding.

As we have said on previous occasions before the Council, the walls, the checkpoints, the violent responses by the security forces, the demolition of houses, the restrictions on non-governmental organizations, violent attacks on individuals or groups and rocket fire will not promote a solution to this conflict.

Turning to the current situation in Syria, we have noted that negotiations are to begin between the Syrian Government and opposition groups. In that regard, we call on all parties to engage in constructive, good faith negotiations in order to bring an end to this conflict, which has had devastating consequences for the Syrian population. Furthermore, we remain concerned about the tensions engendered by the situation between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We must not forget that, should those tensions continue, the entire region would find itself involved in even more conflicts.

In conclusion, Guatemala invites the parties to pursue the dialogue in order to seek stability in the region and respect for human rights and, in particular, to reduce the level of violence inflicted against civilians in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. AlJarallah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am very pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

I thank you, Madam, for your invitation to participate in this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

This meeting is of particular importance as it takes place as the crimes and executions carried out by Israel, the occupying Power, and extremist settlers continue apace. The perpatrators know no political, legal or moral limits. There have been over 160 Palestinian victims since October, a third of whom have been women and children. Over 700 people have been injured by live ammunition or rubber bullets, and thousands of Palestinians have been detained under very harsh conditions. These actions constitute human rights violations and violations of international law and international instruments.

The OIC reaffirms that these facts cannot be considered without taking into account the actions of Israel, the occupying Power. In Jerusalem, Israel carries out actions of a racist nature that seek to modify the geography and demography of the city and to obliterate the Arab characteristics of the city, as well as its religious and historic features. They also constitute an attempt to isolate the city from its Palestinian environment. There have been repeated attacks against holy Christian and Muslim sites. We reiterate that these actions are a blatant violation of international law and international legitimacy that will only stoke extremist violence and hatred and spark a religious conflict that will threaten international peace and security.

These substantial violations of international law, which have exceeded all limits, require a new response from the international community. Israel cannot continue to act as if it were above the law. It cannot continue to commit such crimes without fear of response or penalty. In that context, we urge the Council to assume its responsibilities for protecting the Palestinian people and to force Israel to put an end to its attacks, cease hostilities, halt the building of settlements and the Judaization of Jerusalem, end its attacks on Muslim and Christian holy sites, and to stop the daily

and bloody attacks against the Palestinian people. This is an absolute priority if we are to safeguard the two-State vision.

Resolving the current crisis will require political will on the part of the Council in the form of a resolution calling for an end to the Israeli occupation within a set time frame, in line with international benchmarks and pursuant to the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, so that security and stability may reign in the region, so that we may reach a just and lasting peace, and in order to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders.

The international community must not let the progress of the past 20 years go up in smoke due to the arrogance and intransigence of Israel. We reiterate the importance of convening an international conference with the participation of all active and influential stakeholders with a view to reviving the peace process and bestowing a framework to efforts aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and making the two-State solution a reality.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our support for the Palestinian people and their struggle for their fundamental national rights, including the rights to return, self-determination and a sovereign, independent State in the occupied Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Let us not forget also the right of Palestinian refugees to an equitable solution in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the delegation of Uruguay for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, with a focus on Palestine.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made by representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and of the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The ongoing violence and conflicts in different parts of the Middle East continue to touch a raw nerve within the international community. The protracted conflicts have already exacted an insufferable toll, with many women and children among the civilian casualties. The massive displacement of peoples across and within borders have resulted in a dire humanitarian situation, further compounded by the denial of access to some badly affected populations. The mostly fratricidal and sectarian conflicts have added to the strength of terrorists and violent extremists, who have thrived both on the region's resources and on the peoples' sense of despair and lack of entitlement. The situation in the Middle East is thus untenable and deserves the Council's unmitigated attention.

The Palestinian question remains at the heart of the turmoil in the Middle East. It underpins a number of political, moral and ideological rifts that we see being played out on the broader canvas of our current geopolitical realities. It is no doubt convenient for various groups with a vested interest to allow these rifts and divisions to widen further, in total disregard for the will and conscience of peoples around the world. We must reject such parochial, self-defeating schemes and continue to remain on the right side of history on the Palestinian question.

In line with our constitutional commitment, the Government and the people of Bangladesh maintain unwavering support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. We believe that the continued Israeli occupation, expansion of settlements and indiscriminate attacks against civilians constitute systematic violations of international humanitarian law and human rights principles. We continue to urge all key actors to remain engaged in the pursuit of a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

In that spirit, we support OIC proposals to work towards a Council resolution to revive political efforts aimed at achieving the desired two-State solution and convening an international conference to address the multidimensional aspects of the Palestinian question in a focused, structured and holistic manner. Our collective solidarity with the Palestinian people must be translated into sustained, result-oriented and meaningful actions.

Within the United Nations, we commit to continuing our efforts to enhance the voice and visibility of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, as we do through other relevant international platforms. The people of Bangladesh stand ready to extend a hand of support to the brotherly Palestinian people at any hour of need.

The toxic and corrosive messages used by many terrorists and violent extremist groups around the world often use the Palestinian question in order to create justification and legitimacy for their own misguided agendas. It is of course our shared responsibility to expose the sheer hypocrisy and hollowness of their arguments and defeat them through a combination of strategies rooted in human rights principles. However, such principles may still fall short of reaching our ultimate objectives, if we fail to seriously and unequivocally factor in the need to mobilize our combined political efforts, including through the Council, to find a peaceful solution to the Middle East crisis and thus deny our opponents one of their core rallying agendas. In Bangladesh, under the watchful guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's zero-tolerance approach, we remain vigilant so that violent extremists cannot just employ any cause, no matter how legitimate it may be, for their distorted ideologies and actions.

The international community has recently demonstrated, including through the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015), that it is indeed possible to put aside differences and find creative, forward-looking solutions in search of peace, although beset with uphill political and diplomatic challenges. Drawing inspiration from some of the recent achievements, we feel encouraged by the firm high-level commitments that we have heard in the Council Chamber throughout the day and harbour renewed hopes for an early resumption of the Middle East peace process despite all odds. We should look towards the continued determination and engagement of the members of the Council to make good on such commitments.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka): Let me take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I also join other speakers in commending the President for having convened today's timely and important debate.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Sri Lanka reaffirms its steadfast support to the Palestinian cause. This debate reminds us once again of the urgency of finding a just solution to the question of Palestine and addressing the plight of the Palestinian people. Especially at this time of unprecedented unrest in the Middle East, when our focus is on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Daesh and the exigent refugee crisis in Syria, the world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, where conditions are indefensible. We stress the urgency of leadership to end the marginalization and oppression of Palestinians in their own land.

Sri Lanka supports the work of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which keep the majority of the people in Gaza supplied with the bare necessities, including education. We reiterate the need for continued funding by the donor community to enable UNRWA to function effectively.

As Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Sri Lanka is particularly concerned about the escalating violence and the number of casualties that include infants. The root cause for the escalating violence is the continuing policy of settlement expansion and the climate of impunity relating to the activities of the settlers.

Israel's settlement activities violate international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, and exacerbate the incidents of violence in the region. The international community has repeatedly called for a freeze on settlement activity. The Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council, as well as the International Court of Justice, have all unequivocally condemned the settlement activity as illegal. Ending such practices, which contribute to human suffering and continuing friction in the occupied territories, are

essential steps that must be taken in order to improve the situation on the ground.

Due to the blockade placed on Gaza, approximately 80 per cent of families there are now dependent on humanitarian aid from the United Nations for their survival. Unemployment levels remain at around 40 per cent and movement restrictions in and out of Gaza continue to be a major problem for the economy and welfare of the people of Palestine. Restrictions on imports and exports are stifling economic growth. They need to be lifted within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009), as it would contribute considerably to the economic advancement of Gaza and the well-being of its people.

My delegation calls for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. The blockade of the Gaza Strip is yet another obstacle to peace. More than one year after widespread destruction in Gaza, thousands of families continue to live in their damaged homes, even during the winter months. As of August 2015, only one third of the $4 billion pledged had been disbursed, and up to 100,000 Palestinians remained displaced and living in untenable conditions. Civilians are struggling for access to electricity, water and health care.

Both parties to the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice. We are also mindful of the security needs of Israel. The indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians will lead to a counterproductive cycle of violence. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

It is important to remain engaged in a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. The viability of the two-State solution will depend on the political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people. We are confident that Palestinian internal reconciliation efforts will continue. The progress made by the Palestinian Authority, despite severe political and economic constraints, is commendable.

Sri Lanka fully supports the work of United Nations agencies serving Palestinians, but it is important to realize that continued indiscriminate attacks against civilians will only enhance feelings of desperation and insecurity. The question of Palestine remains a serious threat to international peace and security. Therefore, a comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian question is a priority for the international community. Despite decades of disappointment, we are encouraged that the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and the strength of purpose to gain their legitimate rights and have prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity, which is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign, independent Palestine.

Finally, we also welcome resolution 2254 (2015), which endorses the road map for a peace process in Syria and sets a timetable for talks. Its effective implementation will be vital for the overall situation in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Foradori (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Uruguay on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. I am grateful for the invitation to participate in today's open debate on an issue of such importance for the international community — the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

We are pleased that Uruguay has once again been elected as non-permanent member of the Council, after a long-standing absence of 50 years. As we are familiar with the quality of Uruguayan diplomacy and the contributions it has made to the United Nations through eminent persons who played a part in developing international policy, and international public law in particular, we are convinced that, during its two-year mandate, your country, Sir, will make a considerable contribution to the work of the Council.

The year 2016 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the holding of the Madrid Peace Conference, and next year will mark a half-century since the adoption of landmark resolution 242 (1967).

Argentina is deeply concerned about the proliferation of conflicts in the Middle East. Those conflicts, tensions and violence have triggered a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale, with hundreds of thousands dead and wounded, internally displaced persons and refugees. We strongly support all efforts aimed, not without difficulty, at consolidating peace in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, and we support the active role played by the United Nations in all these processes as guarantor of the each country's efforts to find its own path to peace and security.

As a country that actively participates in international humanitarian assistance through the White Helmets initiative, Argentina is committed to support peace and development in the region not only politically and diplomatically, but also through humanitarian supplies and the caring work of our volunteers. Indeed, with respect to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and the situation of its refugees, Argentina has not only expressed solidarity with them but has sent a team of White Helmet volunteer experts to camps under the direction of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and has also sent humanitarian supplies to the Lebanese Republic, with the same aim of supporting assistance that is being provided there to Syrian refugees.

Furthermore, our country is formalizing its provision to the Secretary-General of expert teams of White Helmet volunteers for managing refugee camps, distributing food, medicines and other donations, providing psychological and social support and general logistics, and training for local staff on these issues. The volunteers are to be deployed to assist Syrian refugees in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and wherever the United Nations deems it most appropriate, thus underscoring our solidarity and commitment to improving humanitarian situations affecting fraternal peoples in the region.

As in any conflict, the primary responsibility for finding a solution lies first and foremost with the leaders of the parties directly involved, in this case the States of Israel and Palestine, which must show that they are willing to work to build sustainable peace and security for the benefit of their peoples. But it should also be clear that the international community represented here, in particular the Security Council, has a collective responsibility and cannot stand at the sidelines of a conflict that perpetually goes on without any prospects for a solution. Throughout the years we have noted that there can be no military solution to this conflict, so we as the international community must devote ourselves as a priority to creating anew a genuine political plan and redouble our efforts so that the Palestinians and Israelis can regain the hope that peace is still possible.

The parameters of a negotiated solution have been set forth on numerous occasions in the Security Council and at the General Assembly, as well as in agreements signed by the parties, the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and other international instruments. Israel must end its occupation of the territories occupied in 1967, find a mutually acceptable solution to the status of Jerusalem and resolve the refugee issue in a fair manner. Israel must end its policy of building settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, which are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. The negative impact of settlements on the ground is enormous and works to undermine the two-State solution.

At the same time, Palestinian leaders should honestly address Israeli security concerns. Hamas and other Palestinian groups must stop incitement and attacks against Israeli civilians. The launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel must cease immediately. Accordingly, my country vigorously condemns such terrorist acts against Israel and is convinced that just as there is no military solution to this conflict, so there is no solution that can be imposed by terrorist methods.

Regional instability is being fuelled by a terrorist threat that is far more complex than in the past. It is a threat that includes violent extremism and the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to the Middle East, particularly to Syria and Iraq. This serious threat shakes the very foundations of humankind. As such, terrorism must be firmly and unambiguously condemned in all its forms and manifestations and must be met in an effective manner through joint action by the international community.

Moreover, Argentina believes that the establishment of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East would represent a major step forward in the peace process in the region. In that regard, my country regrets that the failure to reach agreement on the subject at the ninth Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, held in May 2015 here in New York, prevented the adoption of a consensus outcome document.

We believe that the revival of the peace process in the Middle East could decisively contribute to greater stability in the region. It is essential that a substantive and committed dialogue for peace resume immediately, with the clear objective of ending the occupation and bringing about the full independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine, so it can become strong, living in peace side by side with the State of Israel, on the basis of terms accepted by the international community, that is, the two-State solution, with pre-1967 borders, guaranteeing Israel's right to live in peace with its neighbours, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The quest for peace must be a cherished goal for all parties. Examples such as the expansion of the self-styled Islamic State/Daesh are possible only as a result of States' failure to resolve internal and external conflicts and of the power vacuum that ensues. To the extent that States make progress in resolving their conflicts, gaps that serve to fuel the growth of fundamentalism and extreme violence will disappear.

I would now like to express Argentina's concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria, which has undoubtedly contributed to the deterioration of the situation in the region and added extraordinary pressure to countries hosting refugees. Next March marks the fifth anniversary of a tragedy that horrifies us daily, having led to the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. The figures are well known but still dramatic: more than 250,000 people dead, half of them civilians, 6.6 million internally displaced and 4.3 million refugees. Half the Syrian population, approximately 13.5 million people, require urgent humanitarian assistance. These numbers make us realize the size and impact of the conflict, which has left in its wake a country destroyed, a people experiencing untold suffering and a region at the boiling point.

But just when we thought we had seen it all in Syria, our conscience was struck once again by the images from Madaya from a few days ago. We agree with the Secretary-General that the use of food as an instrument of war constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law. There will likely be other situations in Syria like that of Madaya, which makes it necessary for urgent and unconditional access be given to humanitarian assistance throughout the territory of the country. The serious violations of international law and international humanitarian law go far beyond what has happened in Madaya and require that those responsible for them be held accountable. The International Criminal Court may have a very active role to play in that regard.

A solution for the conflict in Syria will have to be political, not military, much less terrorist, which was recognized in resolution 2254 (2015), unanimously adopted by the Council on 18 December. Argentina is pleased that, after years of misunderstandings and disunity with regard to Syria, the members of the Security Council were able to speak with one voice in support of this political solution, which should lead to preserving the sovereignty, independence and unity of Syria and respecting the principle that only the Syrian people have the right to determine their own future.

Two years after the Geneva II Conference on Syria, we are pleased that negotiations between the Syrian parties will resume in a few days, under the mediation of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. The negotiations should lead to a political transition process led by the Syrians themselves and set the terms for a total ceasefire throughout the country. Hopefully, both results will be achieved quickly, with all countries with influence over the parties acting in concert to achieve an early agreement. In that regard, we support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura. At the same time, we must prevent the further militarization of the situation, and therefore we appeal that an end be put to the supply and flow of weapons to all parties. At this stage efforts must be focused on eradicating the terrorist threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front, in order to protect the civilian population, in strict observance of international law and international humanitarian law.

This year, the Republic of Argentina will celebrate the bicentennial of its independence. Argentina's identity has always been based on diversity and the peaceful and harmonious coexistance of its communities of different origin, ethnic groups and religions. This characteristic has forged a unique society, of which we are proud. It is also why Argentina particularly feels the tragedu of the Middle East. We urge for a just, peaceful, negotiated and lasting solution that makes it possible for the peoples to live in harmony, accepting the differences, growing as a result of diversity, learning that dialogue is more valuable than confrontation and that it is more important to broaden horizons than turn ourselves inward. I hope, although it may be naive, that wisdom will prevail over irrationality and that where today

there is death and the ashes of destruction, tomorrow a solid peace will be built with the strong determination of a people prepared to lead their destiny with order and justice.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the flooor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting, and we thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

We also align ourselves with the statements made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Israeli violations continue in the Palestinian territories, including the ongoing unilateral actions and settlement activity by Israel, the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, the restriction of access to the holy sites of Jerusalem, the Judaization of Jerusalem and other violations of United Nations resolutions and international law. It is very concerning that that these severe violations continue without any consideration of their consequences: the escalation of tensions and the destruction of the basis of a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Security Council's obligations to achieve peace in the Middle East require an end to the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab land, the attainment of a peaceful, sustainable and lasting solution that is based on the two-State solution, the establishment of the independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, and in accordance with Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1968) and 338 (1973), the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, the return of refugees and the restoration of all of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We call on the Security Council to compel Israel to respect international law and international humanitarian law and to reject all illegal practices and policies of the occupying Israeli authorities. We also call on the Council to put in place measures to stop these practices, to provide international protection to the Palestinian people, to strive to make tangible progress in the peace process and achieve security and stability for the peoples of the region and to deprive the extremists of the excuses they use to recruit extremists and spread radicalization.

The State of Qatar spares no effort to achieve peace and stability in our region. We have used our various capabilities to assist in the humanitarian aspect to address the consequences suffered by the civilians in Gaza. In fulfilling our humanitarian pledges, we have thus far implemented reconstruction projects for Gaza valued at $230 million, including 1,060 residential apartments in His Excellency Sheikh Hamid Bin Khalifa Al Thani's city in Gaza, implementing 25 per cent of a 1,201 residential unit building project, establishing a hospital for rehabilitation and protheses and implementing 45 domestic roads projects.

The continued suffering of the Syrian civilians, given the international community's inability to end the suffering and stop the war crimes and crimes against humanity that continue to be carried out by the Syrian regime and associated militias and to implement United Nations resolutions, the horrifying images transmitted by humanitarian agencies of civilians fighting death as a result of starvation policies and newborn babies that have been deprived of the right to life, through the use of indiscriminate barrel bombing, is all a disgrace to humankind — humankind that has assumed the obligation to learn from the past. The Security Council demanded in resolution 2254 (2015) that all measures be taken to protect the civilians in Syria. It also called for unconditional and immediate access to the suffering population in Syria, to release the detainees who have been detained arbitrarily, to stop immediately all attacks against civilians and civilian targets and to fully implement all Security Council resolutions on Syria. Unfortunately, none of those demands have been implemented, which necessitates consideration of additional measures based on paragraph 6 of resolution 2258 (2015).

The State of Qatar stresses the contents of resolution 2254 (2015), that the only lasting solution for the crisis in Syria is through an inclusive Syrian political process with Syrian leadership that fulfils the aspirations of the people and fully implements the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) through an inclusive transitional authority with full executive powers. My country will participate in the high-level Syria pledging conference to be held in London next month. Qatar will contribute to all international efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East and to achieve the aspirations of all peoples of the region and will participate in all efforts towards achieving these goals.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): Despite continued turmoil in the Middle East, some political developments give cause for cautious optimism. The recent implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is a victory for diplomacy and an important milestone for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts internationally. The agreement demonstrates the strength of joint political efforts and the importance of political will and leadership. Norway is pleased to have contributed to the implementation, in line with the work being done in the run-up to the Nuclear Security Summit to be held in the spring.

We are hopeful that the forthcoming talks in Geneva will contribute to a political settlement of the conflict in Syria. We support all efforts to that end, and we are continuing to contribute to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's efforts to facilitate the talks. However, while we work to find a political solution to the conflict, we must step up our work to alleviate the grave humanitarian situation. Norway therefore urges the international community to be prepared to make pledges when we meet in London next week for the conference on supporting Syria and the region. We need to clearly demonstrate our solidarity with the millions of people in need of our support. We urge the international community to mobilize the resources needed to alleviate the humanitarian situation.

Let me now turn to my Palestinian and Israeli friends. In line with political efforts throughout the region, Norway urges both parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to take all the steps necessary to resume political dialogue and end the current stalemate. The only viable route to achieving lasting peace and stability is a credible political process aimed at a two-State solution. The responsibility, and thereby the key to resolving the conflict, lies primarily with the parties themselves.

Norway encourages the Security Council to resume its responsibility and provide constructive assistance in the process. The situation as it is now cannot continue. The current tensions call for immediate and coordinated political steps by all sides. In order to make progress, the following four actions need to be taken.

First, violence must stop. Everyone must strive to lower the level of conflict.

Secondly, Israel should stop building new settlements on occupied land and stop expanding existing ones. Israel should refrain from land confiscation and house demolitions. Activities of that kind only serve to undermine any political process.

Thirdly, Palestine needs to strengthen its political institutions and governance structures and implement essential reforms. In particular, efforts on a far larger scale than we are seeing today are needed to improve the situation in Gaza. With respect to reintegrating the governance framework under a single authority, the parameters of the security agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization must be fully respected.

Fourthly, there is a need for urgent cooperation between the parties on tangible measures to strengthen the Palestinian economy and the reconstruction of Gaza, with a view to advancing a political process. During the current stalemate, Norway, along with the international community, will make every effort to encourage the parties to maintain the vision of the two-State solution.

While we are aware that donor countries are facing ongoing budget reallocations and development budget cuts, we urge all donors to maintain their current level of aid to the Palestinian Authority. That is particularly important during this turbulent period in the Middle East. We cannot afford to see the Palestinian Authority institutions start to unravel. Supporting long-term institution-building is key to achieving stability. Supporting viable Palestinian State-building remains at the core of our engagement and commitment to peace. Those efforts are vital in order to prepare for the next meeting of the international donor group, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, which is scheduled for April.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Çevik (Turkey): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate.

The Middle East is today more unstable and unpredictable than at any time in recent history. However, the proliferation of crises in the wider region must not distract us from the urgent need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which remains a core challenge.

The continuing Israeli occupation and its practices in contravention of international law, such as the recent decision on land appropriation in the West Bank, hamper efforts to establish a permanent peace. The expansion of illegal settlements, the denial of the Palestinians' rights to use natural resources, arbitrary arrests, the suppression of freedom of association and assembly, the excessive use of force, as well as efforts aimed at undermining the status and Islamic sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif, must immediately stop.

The situation in Gaza also remains worrisome. The international community cannot afford to stand by idly in the face of the tragedy of 1.8 million people suffering under an inhumane blockade for nine years. Israel should respond to the continuous calls and lift the siege on the Gaza Strip in order to allow the Gazans to build their livelihoods.

The historical injustice against the Palestinian people, reinforced by the illegal practices of Israel on the ground, is fuelling hatred, alienation and radicalism in the region and beyond. To the extent that the Palestinian people lack hope, their reaction grows. The only way out of this impasse is to convince the Palestinians that their future will be better than today and that they will be sitting at the negotiation table as the State of Palestine in equal standing with Israel.

We all agree that the status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable. The international trend towards the recognition of the State of Palestine is a reflection of that frustration. The recent decision by the European Union with regard to labelling products from the settlements and the raising of the Palestinian flag at United Nations Headquarters are steps in the right direction. Needless to say, the root cause of the problem is the illegal occupation of East Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories by Israel. In that regard, the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only viable solution. The Security Council should also assume its primary responsibility vis-à-vis international peace and security.

The situation in Syria today is the greatest disaster we have encountered since the Second World War. As a neighbouring country, Turkey is extremely concerned by the humanitarian and security impacts of the crisis, which constitute a major national security threat. In that regard, we maintain our resolute stance in the fight against terrorism, without making a distinction between the terrorist organizations.

We are at a critical time in Syria. The crisis can be overcome only by a political solution. The work of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and the subsequent adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) accelerated the efforts to revitalize the political process. The political process should lead to a transition period with concrete timelines, a new constitution and elections. In the meantime, the Council should assume the implementation of all the measures, including those related to a nationwide ceasefire and to humanitarian access, and outlined in its very own resolution 2254 (2015).

The Syrian people can regain their faith in the international community only if they see an improvement of humanitarian conditions on the ground. The tragic stories of starvation and death in the besieged town of Madaya are just the latest examples of violations of the most fundamental principles of international law. The regime's brutal policies and indiscriminate attacks against its own population, as well as the recent air strikes by its allies targeting civilians and moderate opposition under the pretext of fighting Daesh, must stop. Such attacks not only undermine the prospects for a political solution, but also contribute to the worsening of the scourge of terrorism.

The moderate opposition cannot be expected to negotiate under fire. In addition, it should be entitled to designate its own representatives. Non-intervention by third parties in the composition of the opposition negotiation team is a must for the credibility and sustainability of the process. Attempts to dilute and weaken the opposition would only harm the process before it even starts.

The current tragedy will not end unless the people of Syria have a legitimate Government that truly represents their will and enjoys their full consent. On that score, the Syrian people have already spoken. Now it is time for us — the members of the ISSG — to prepare the ground for a real process that will lead to genuine political change.

Syria's security is also linked to the international community's efforts to counter Daesh in Iraq, as a lasting victory against Daesh can be achieved only if coupled with an inclusive strategy. We welcome the recent progress by the Iraqi army and the liberation of Ramadi. However, it is important to consolidate those gains and increase the capability of Iraqi forces. In that regard, we would like to reiterate our commitment to supporting Iraq in its efforts to fight Daesh.

Some recent developments have served to demonstrate once again the merits of diplomacy. In that regard, we welcome the announcement on the achievement of the implementation date of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding the Iranian nuclear programme. In addition, the signing of the Libyan political agreement and the recent steps towards the establishment of the Libyan Government of national accord are also promising for the restoration of stability in Libya.

We have affirmed our full support to the future Libyan Government during the visit to Ankara on 11 January by Prime Minister-Designate Fayez Sarraj. We stand ready to respond to future requests of the Government of national accord.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): My delegation wishes to congratulate Uruguay on assuming its seat on the Security. In its capacity as President of the Security Council, we thank Uruguay for having convened this quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, with a focus on Palestine. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his dedicated efforts to resolve the conflict in the Middle East, and take note of his trip to Palestine in October of last year.

It is with grave concern that the Maldives notes that a peaceful resolution of the situation in Palestine is moving ever further out of reach. Although Israel has expressed commitment to a two-State solution, its actions have not substantiated that. On the contrary, it continues to strengthen and expand its control of the occupied territory of Palestine, including the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, with no regard for the 1967 borders. My delegation calls on Israel to translate its words into concrete actions, not to make empty promises purely for diplomatic and political gain.

My delegation is pleased to acknowledge the increasing support for recognizing Palestine as an independent and autonomous State under a two-State solution, symbolized at United Nations Headquarters on 30 September 2014 by the raising of the flag of Palestine as an observer State. While this is a meaningful step in the right direction, we still have a long way to go to affirm that recognition in the international sphere. The Maldives continues to support Palestine on its journey to becoming a full State Member of the United Nations. The privileges and respect that it deserves as a State have been denied it for far too long.

My delegation also firmly condemns the unwarranted restrictions that Israel has imposed on the Palestinian people, hindering their access to basic necessities and threatening their lives and livelihoods. This is particularly relevant in the light of the continued violence being perpetrated against Palestinian communities. It is regrettable that at the beginning of this month the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories felt compelled to tender his resignation because Israel had repeatedly refused to grant him access as an impartial and objective observer. The Maldives has always supported and facilitated the work of the special mandate holders of the United Nations, and we believe their duties as objective arbitrators on behalf of the international community should not be obstructed. My delegation calls on the Israeli authorities to cooperate with United Nations mandate holders and other officials in order to enable them to carry out their assigned tasks.

The Palestinian conflict has been constant throughout much of history, and for the past five decades the Palestinian people have been subjected to life under occupation. It is inhumane to make these people continue to suffer and submit to that suffering as a normal way of life. Families live in a constant state of fear, and children are growing up with no understanding or comprehension of peace and stability. In circumstances like these, where all hope is lost and injustice prevails, radicalism and terrorism begin to spawn.

There has been an alarming increase in violence and hostility in the Middle East over the past few months. The Government of the Maldives strongly condemns the despicable attack by violent protesters on the Saudi Arabia Embassy in Iran. We urge that the perpetrators be brought to justice, and highlight the importance of respecting mandatory international obligations, including those under the relevant Vienna conventions. My delegation also strongly condemns the heinous attacks carried out in Beirut in November by the so-called Islamic State. We reiterate that the ideologies and activities of that terrorist group are completely contrary to the principles and beliefs of Islam. We welcome the initiatives the international community has taken to put an end to this evil before it claims more innocent lives.

My delegation calls on the members of the Security Council to take stronger and more meaningful action to end the conflicts in the Middle East, including in Palestine. We welcome political initiatives aimed at achieving permanent and peaceful solutions rather than piecemeal approaches that could aggravate existing conflicts. We also welcome the humanitarian aid that is being dispatched to alleviate the adverse conditions in these war-torn countries. It is important to realize that at the end of the day, peace and security are what every country in the region aspires to achieve for its citizens. With that common goal in mind, we must figure out the shortest non-violent route to that end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Reyes Rodríguez (*spoke in Spanish*): We are honoured to have the Eastern Republic of Uruguay presiding over the Security Council this month, and it is doubly pleasing that two countries of Latin America, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, will fulfil that task in 2016.

With 2015 now ended, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains deeply troubling. The acts of violence to which the prevailing despair drives Palestinian youth continue, and Israel, the occupying Power, continues to respond with overwhelming and excessive force. And while there are a host of challenges facing the region as well as affecting many Member States outside it, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a top priority and should not be relegated to secondary status by other, seemingly more urgent, crises.

What many who talk, with good reason, of the dangers of violent extremism are missing is the fact that the unresolved question of Palestine is one of the principal tools for extremist recruitment, and that Israel's occupation of Palestine's lands and ill-treatment of its people is one of the main reasons that idealistic and impressionable young people are attracted to such extreme and unforgivable forms of rebellion. If we, the nations of the world, are fully committed to preventing violent extremism within our own borders and fighting it wherever it occurs, we must do all we can to find a comprehensive, just, lasting and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine that will enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights within a sovereign country of their own, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace with Israel.

The path to that solution is clear, and has been for a long time. The terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by the League of Arab States in 2002, and the Quartet road map for a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, endorsed by the Security Council in 2003, form the basis for it. They are accepted by the international community as the best, indeed the only, way to arrive at a peaceful settlement.

The situation on the ground today remains bleak, and the temptation to give up — or at least to press the pause button on the issue and for the time being to deal with others — is great. Gaza is still under a near-total blockade and its reconstruction is progressing far too slowly. The Israeli settlement construction has not stopped; Israeli settlers continue their extremist acts; and the Israeli Government continues to apply a double standard to the violence committed by Israelis against Palestinians versus the Palestinians' struggles against the Israeli occupation. Jerusalem remains a classic tinderbox, one spark away from igniting a religious war that could embroil the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the other regional conflagrations.

Yes, the situation does indeed seem bleak. But it is at this moment — at a time when the Palestinian people cannot envisage a viable future, when the Israeli people have given up all hope of a peace process, when after more than 20 years of on-and-off negotiations no mutual trust remains — it is precisely at this point that we, the peoples of the world who have come together at these United Nations, must step up and provide the blueprint for a path forward. We must rekindle the candle of hope and ensure that it is never extinguished. That is our responsibility and we must not fail to carry it out. Within the Organization, it is the Security Council, as the organ to which the Charter assigned the responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, that must assume that responsibility and act to promote the cause of peace for Palestine and Israel.

Over the past 12 months, there have been efforts and discussions behind the scenes, but the time has come to bring all of that out into the spotlight and onto the Council floor. A resolution that sets clear parameters and a time frame for ending the conflict would be the appropriate step. The Palestinian people cannot wait any longer. Every delay raises the risk that the damage on the ground will become truly irreparable. If we allow that to happen, we will not only have failed the

Palestinian people and their neighbours, but also the nations of the world that have entrusted their peace and security to us.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People welcomes all the efforts undertaken by the Council and its members, the Middle East Quartet and all actors with a view to finding a way out of the current situation and to resolving the question of Palestine in accordance with the formula of two States living side by side in peace and security. The Committee will do its best to support those efforts through its own work and reaffirms its commitment to the principle of a peaceful resolution of the conflict based on those premises.

Following the previous debate on the situation in the Middle East in October 2015 (S/PV.7543), the Committee organized events around the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in November. Together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, we convened a conference on the question of Jerusalem and a civil society forum on the question of Palestine, in Jakarta. One aspect that the two events highlighted was the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a religious one, and that anyone trying to exploit it to ignite a religious confrontation is misrepresenting the values of their own religion. These two events reaffirmed our shared universal values of peaceful coexistence among all peoples of the Earth.

In March in Amman, we will hold a round table on legal issues to strengthen the capacities of the State of Palestine to meet its obligations in light of its recent accession to a series of international treaties and conventions. Throughout the year, we will continue to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to support efforts to achieve the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and a just resolution of all issues related to the final status and mobilization of and assistance to the Palestinian people, as mandated by the General Assembly.

The Committee remains open to everyone — Government representatives, members of academia, civil society — who wishes to join us in this noble task.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Castro Cordoba (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the presence of Minister Rodolfo Nin Novoa and we are very pleased to see him preside over the Council, in particular as his country is one of the representatives of our regional group. We congratulate him and the Uruguayan Mission on their work at the helm of the Security Council this month.

We also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing.

The issue before us today remains of particular importance to Costa Rica, in particular on the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations. We are convinced that the situation in the Middle East should remain among the priorities of the Organization. For that reason, we will never tire of calling for the peaceful resolution of conflicts between peoples and States, characterized by respect for international law and human rights. I shall focus my remarks on three clashes in the area: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the situation in Syria and the situation in Yemen.

The escalation of violence in the area remains a concern. Civilians, including women and children, continue to pay a high price, which we strongly condemn. As Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said when he addressed the Security Council on 16 December:

> "The current circumstances should not be accepted as the new normal. Israelis and Palestinians should not be resigned to living under the threat of violence." (*S/PV.7584, p. 2*)

My country reiterates that it is urgent to resume negotiations on the pending core issues of the conflict, based on the obligations already assumed and the agreements previously agreed between the parties, and supported by international law and the decisions of both the Security Council and the General Assembly. It is imperative that a political solution be found to this conflict and that a new architecture of peace to resolve differences be established. Furthermore, those responsible should be prosecuted, and efforts must be pooled in order to halt the spiral of violence and prevent further civilian suffering. We call for efforts, such as those made by the Secretary of State of the United States, John Kerry, which will reach their two-year mark this March, to be pursued, and we hope to obtain results that are as good as those achieved during the negotiating process with Iran.

Costa Rica regrets that the conflict in Syria is entering its sixth year and that the situation continues to deteriorate. It is important to bring an end to the armed conflict and to seek a swift political solution,

above all to the humanitarian crisis. As was stated before the Security Council on 15 January by the Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Syria is increasing and all members of the Security Council are responsible for meeting the basic needs of the victims of the Syrian conflict. "The Council cannot let more people die on its watch" (*S/PV.7605, p. 3*).

The use of barrel bombs and of civilians as a weapon of war in the conflict, as well as the continued trafficking in arms, including in clandestine tunnels, are unjustifiable. In fact, they are detrimental to the situation. We must ensure the full implementation of resolution 2235 (2015) of 7 August 2015, through which, for the first time, accountability will be established for those who have used chemical weapons in Syria against the civilian population.

We also welcome the emblematic adoption by consensus of resolution 2254 (2015) of 18 December 2015 in support of the peace process in Syria. That was the first time the Security Council has endorsed the Vienna negotiations and Geneva communiqués. It is important that the Security Council pursue its implementation of the resolution, in favour of the ceasefire and the inclusion of the opposition, so that a formal dialogue can be established with a view to the transition process, as well as free and fair elections. We hope that the peace negotiations to begin in Geneva on 29 January will achieve the best results possible and, as Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura said, start on the right foot. We hope that the negotiations will truly mark the beginning of a real peace process.

With regard to the current situation in Yemen, my delegation is concerned about developments in the conflict and in the situation in which even the Al-Thawra hospital has been repeatedly attacked. Basic services and items, such as water and medicine, are scarce. In the light of this situation, we join the calls of the United Nations to allow humanitarian access to the area and for a permanent ceasefire. We welcome the statements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights announcing that the Yemeni Government has revised its position and will allow the Special Envoy to Yemen to continue his work in the country.

Costa Rica reiterates its concern about rising tensions among regional Powers that escalate the tone of the fighting and therefore makes a strong call for peace in the Middle East. We remain confident that the Security Council can fully exercise its mandate to maintain international peace and security and fully uphold international justice and the rule of law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We support the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be of serious concern to the international community. Furthermore, it is particularly worrisome that the Security Council continues to hold open debates on the Middle East, in which there is overwhelming support for the Palestinian cause, but has not adopted a resolution demanding that Israel put an immediate end to the military occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories, the blockade on the Gaza Strip and the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories, and be accountable for the war crimes and collective punishment committed by Israel against the Palestinian people.

Why is this organ not assuming its responsibilities? What is it waiting for? Who is it trying to protect by failing to act? Why is it that, even in the face of a clear breach to international peace and security, no tangible measures have been taken but yet, there is an increasing number of debates being held in the Council daily on issues that do not fall within its purview? Regrettably, persistent opposition from the United States, through the anachronistic use of the veto, has prevented a decision from being taken on the question of Palestine in the Council.

The Council should take steps to ensure an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and guarantee the peaceful coexistence of two States, based on the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State, with its capital in East Jerusalem and in line with the pre-1967 borders, and a fair solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We are convinced that resolving this long-standing conflict would help to greatly reduce current tensions in the Middle East.

Once again, my delegation reiterates its strong condemnation of the Israeli colonization campaign

in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and all measures, policies and practices associated with the campaign, which include, in addition to the construction and expansion of illegal settlements and the wall, the destruction and confiscation of Palestinian land and property, the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families and the transfer of settlers into the occupied Palestinian territory, among other violations of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions. Such actions jeopardize the viability of a Palestinian State and the ability to resolve the conflict in a fair and balanced manner.

We also condemn, and demand a definitive end to, violence, provocation and incitement to hatred and terror by Israeli settlers and mass arbitrary arrests and imprisonments.

Cuba reaffirms its full support for the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the Organization and calls on the Security Council to decide and accept without delay Palestine's application in 2011 to be recognized as a State Member of the United Nations, as clearly desired by the vast majority of the Members of the Organization. The historical debt to the Palestinian people is enormous and must be repaid. The Council must assume it responsibility and take action to end to such a long period of injustice.

The situation in Syria continues to be of concern to the international community. It will be possible to achieve peace in that country only by respecting the right of the Syrian people to decide their own destiny. A political solution through dialogue and negotiation is the only option for ending the conflict in Syria. We demand that an end be put to interference in Syria's domestic affairs. Those who fuel the conflict from the outside, with the stated goal of regime change, are responsible for the thousands of civilian casualties recorded in the four years of fighting. Once again, we reiterate our concern about the loss of innocent lives as a result of the Syrian conflict and condemn all acts of violence being perpetrated against the civilian population in that country. The putative protection of human life and the fight against extremist elements cannot be a pretext for foreign intervention. That is why we demand the cessation of the foreign presence in Syria, as it does not have the approval of its Government and is not working in coordination with its authorities.

The role of the Security Council is crucial in achieving the aspirations of well-being, peace and development that all peoples in the Middle East deserve. Its member States should be advocates of peaceful solutions, without foreign interference, that safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and contribute decisively to the preservation of the lives of the people affected by conflict in the region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate your country on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and wish it every success. I also thank you, Sir, for having convened today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of your friendly country for being here and for presiding over some of today's meeting. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing at the start of the meeting. I would also like to congratulate all of the countries with a seat on the Council this year and wish them every success in their work.

Allow me to thank the Council for its honourable position in firmly condemning the barbaric aggression perpetrated on the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Tehran and its Consulate in Mashhad. We hope that the Council will ask the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to respect its legal international obligations in protecting diplomatic missions and prosecute all those responsible for such attacks, including those who incited, planned and carried them out. It is not enough to just make apologetic statements on behalf of the Iranian authorities.

My delegation would like to state that the Palestinian cause has always been and remains at the very heart of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's interests. Regardless of the challenges or the difficulties that are ravaging our part of the world, none of this will deter us or prevent us from standing side by side with the Palestinian people in their ongoing resilient defence of their territory and sacred heritage against the Israeli occupation and its colonial practices and its violations of international legitimacy.

We have come to the Security Council, as we have done repeatedly in the past, to ask that it condemn the official organized terrorism carried out by Israel as well as the crimes committed by its colonial army

and terrorist settlers, starting with the systematic assassinations, the construction of settlements, the Judaization and the ethnic cleansing, all of which are war crimes or crimes against humanity. All of this has been documented in the United Nations reports. All of this is taking place without Israel worrying about anything or anyone — and being accountable to no one.

As a result, Israel continues the use of deadly force against Palestinians, exploits and tortures Palestinians, including women and children and adolescents. The Israeli war machine continues to deport Palestinians, seize and confiscate their lands and pursues settlement policies, while ignoring any of the legal consequences, without being accountable to anyone and without fearing anything. The Israeli authorities continue to Judaize Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the historic Islamic and Christian sites and attempt to erase the Arab identity and change the historic situation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its esplanade, without being accountable to anyone.

Israel continues to defy the will of the international community. It continues to build the wall of separation. It also continues to exploit the resources of the occupied Arab Golan and engage in the illegal trade of Israeli settlers' goods and produce coming from occupied Palestinian and Arab lands, in brazen and fearless violation of the International Court of Justice and various United Nations resolutions. The unfair blockade imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, over the Gaza Strip continues from year to year. That is compounded by Israel's arbitrary practices in the West Bank, which have led to a deterioration in terms of poverty and the absence of any possibility for a decent life for Palestinians — all of this without being accountable to anyone or fearing anything.

We will always remind the Security Council of its responsibility and its duty to hold Israel responsible for what it does and asking it to account for the war crimes it has always carried out. We ask the Council again to set up an international protection regime for the occupied Palestinian State, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, pursuant to the Fourth Geneva Convention and the resolutions of international legitimacy.

We also call upon the Council to take the immediate steps needed to safeguard genuine opportunities for peace and the two-State solution. We call upon Israel to cease its settlement policies and the confiscation of Palestinian lands. We also call upon Israel to implement all political, security and economic agreements that have been signed but never implemented. We also ask the Council to back efforts aimed at setting up a timeline for Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian lands, the remaining part of Lebanese lands under occupation and the Syrian Arab Golan, and to withdraw to the borders of 4 June 1967 until a lasting and just peace is achieved pursuant to resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, in order to ensure that the Palestinian people will be able to enjoy their independence and build their sovereign State.

In the past five years, the Security Council has not been able to discharge its duty when it comes to the protection of the Syrian people against the killing, terrorism and genocide carried out by the Syrian authorities against their people, which have claimed over 300,000 victims, led to the displacement of 12 million Syrians and destroyed the country. We regret that the Security Council has not been able, despite its repeated relevant resolutions, to lift the siege of Madaya and the other cities that are currently being besieged to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches inaccessible regions, leaving over 400,000 individuals under the threat of famine. This brings us back to a situation that could rightly have occurred in the Middle Ages.

We have seen with our own eyes what has happened in Madaya and how human beings have become living skeletons. Those images should lead to increased humanity in us; they need to move us to action. We have seen how efforts undertaken to exert pressure on the Syrian regime have led to an opening of partial access to humanitarian assistance to certain besieged regions. I believe that it is simply unacceptable that the international community is forced to exert pressure on the Syrian authorities to meet the nutritional and medical needs of its own citizens. What the Syrian authorities are doing in that regard is inhuman. It is tantamount to a war crime.

We affirm our condemnation of all types of siege or blockade that plunge the population into hunger. It matters little that the authorities are behind these crimes, but we remind the Council that 12 of the 14 besieged cities are under the control of the Syrian Government, their Hizbullah allies and criminal gangs. We would like to state clearly that the volume of humanitarian assistance is simply insufficient and is not an alternative to forcing the Syrian authorities and their allies to immediately lift the sieges on all cities and villages in Syria.

We see no path forward in resolving this humanitarian disaster other than through a political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the two Vienna declarations. We would therefore like to reiterate our support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and for his mandate pursuant to the resolution which calls for the total and complete implementation of the Geneva communiqué and a launch of official negotiations for a political transition phase (resolution 2254 (2015)). We also back efforts aimed at implementing a ceasefire pursuant to that resolution, in parallel with political efforts, and to take steps towards the implementation of the ceasefire following the implementation of the first stages of the political transition process under the auspices of the United Nations on the basis of the Geneva communiqué.

We are also going to continue our work through the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) to ensure a political transition pursuant to the Geneva communiqué and Vienna declarations. The position mandated by the ISSG has attempted to bring together a broader ranger of the opposition to select their representatives in the negotiations and fix their positions without foreign interference.

The various factions and groups of the Syrian opposition attending the conference in Riyadh were able to unify their positions, which was a very important step on the path to identifying a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We pay tribute to the efforts undertaken by the Syrian opposition, and we will unconditionally maintain our absolute support for the Syrian people in fulfilling their needs and aspirations, while preserving the unity and sovereignty of Syria, regardless of sect or origin.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Bosah (Nigeria): My delegation thanks the Uruguayan presidency for convening this open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his lucid briefing and for his leadership in the search for peace in the Middle East.

Nigeria is concerned about the upsurge in violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. That presents a risk of a wider escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also complicates the search for peace. Extremists on both sides must be prevented from dictating the political agenda. Provocative actions and hostile rhetoric must be avoided. Political leaders must take the lead in ensuring that calm is restored.

Reports of the Israeli Government's decision to expropriate 150 hectares of land in the West Bank are deeply worrying. If implemented, the expropriation would constitute the largest seizure of land by Israel in the West Bank since August 2014. The expropriation of land, the construction of homes and other settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories violate international law and fuel the resentment of the Palestinians. They also undermine the viability of the two-State solution, which the international community broadly accepts as the only path to resolving the question of Palestine. The Israeli authorities must freeze all settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in compliance with their obligations under international law.

The role of the Quartet remains vital to the Middle East peace process, and Nigeria continues to follow very closely the activities of the group. In that regard, we welcome the recent visit of the Quartet envoys to the region and their engagement with Israeli and Palestinian officials. We take positive note of their discussions, which focused on, among other issues, the need for both sides to oppose incitement, de-escalate the situation and take concrete actions to demonstrate their commitment to the two-State solution. We urge Israel and Palestine to maintain and indeed strengthen their engagement with the Quartet in the search for peace.

The current stalemate in the Middle East peace process is neither ideal nor sustainable. Both sides must take concrete steps to return to negotiations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant agreements between them. Nigeria reiterates its strong support for a two-State solution with Israel and Palestine, existing side by side in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Moumani (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first to congratulate you, Madam President, on Uruguay's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I thank the delegation of the United States for presiding over the Council so skilfully last month. I also congratulate the new members of the Security Council. Jordan fully supports

all the efforts of the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt, the Arab member of the Security Council.

Fundamental changes have taken place in the international security architecture over the past several years. Civil wars have spread throughout the world. Conflicts are by their very nature more complex, entailing terrible humanitarian consequences. In 2015, the crisis in the Middle East accounted for 35.5 per cent of the Security Council's meetings on specific States or situations in the region. Furthermore, the region was discussed in numerous other thematic meetings under other items concerning terrorism and defending religions, civilizations and cultural heritage. The situations in the occupied Arab territories, Syria and Yemen were among the subjects most debated during the closed consultations of the Security Council last year and they year before.

Those statistics reflect the gravity of the situation in the Middle East, where millions of people are living through a conflict — the Arab-Israeli conflict — that dates back more than 60 years, with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at its core. The international community, through various resolutions, has laid out the parameters for a solution that have been ignored rather than implemented. To live in peace and security is a fundamental right and need for all peoples wishing to build a future based on dignity. We therefore believe that the failure to achieve such a future would have terrible consequences for the region and world, in general.

The only way to achieve peace in the Middle East and to prevent bloodshed is for the Palestinian people to recover their legitimate right to live in security, dignity, freedom and security without occupation, in an independent and viable State within its pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital and in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process and the Arab Peace Initiative, in peace and security with all the States and peoples of the region.

Jordan is living the question of Palestine; we are not just outside observers or mere mediators. We have a historic role in that cause and its service. We will continue our efforts on behalf of negotiations leading to the two-State solution within a set time frame, and take up all of the final status issues, in accordance with international initiatives and the Arab Peace Initiative. We shall do so in a way that meets all of Jordan's vital interests with regard to those issues, particularly with regard to the refugees and Jerusalem.

Unilateral and provocative measures, especially settlement policies, must be abandoned. The Israeli occupation authorities must cease all unilateral measures in occupied East Jerusalem and all Islamic and Christian sites in Jerusalem. In that context, let me stress that Jordan will continue to confront all Israeli violations, provocations and aggressions that target Islamic and Christian holy sites, in particular the Al-Aqsa Mosque, because His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein is the trustee of all Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. Israel must cease its illegal behaviour. The international community must reject all illegal unilateral measures that block the path to peace.

Jordan stresses the need to maintain and increase the diplomatic momentum aimed at finding a comprehensive political solution to the tragic situation in Syria. Jordan's position under the leadership of King Abdullah II has been clear. We have stressed the need to work for a political solution that maintains Syria's territorial integrity and political independence, restores peace and stability, repairs its social fabric and ensures the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). As a step towards achieving the solution set forth in the resolution, the announcement of the commencement of negotiations on 29 January is very encouraging.

My country is hosting a very large number of Syrian refugees, with whom we are sharing our meagre resources. The international community must be aware of all the burdens we are bearing in that regard and it should help us bear them. We therefore call on the international community to support Jordan's appeal for $10 billion for the next three years.

The dangers of terrorism have spread throughout the world under different names and those terrorist groups are now using different means of war. A coalition has been established and His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein has stated that this is our war, as Muslims, against those who distort our noble religion. It is of the utmost importance to coordinate and cooperate at the international level to combat extremist thinking and ideology for the long term.

We are convinced that peace, security and stability can be achieved in the Middle East for the prosperity of our people. We in Jordan are committed to playing our role in that endeavour.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Haiti.

Mr. Régis (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): Perhaps never before in the recent history of the situation in the Middle East has the region been fraught with so many threats to international peace and security. It is therefore the honour and duty of the Security Council, aware of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, to strive to meet the challenge posed by the current situation. In that regard, it is fitting to pay tribute to the initiative of the presidency of Uruguay, which represents an innovative and courageous step in that direction.

Terrorism, with its serious consequences, is undoubtedly at the forefront of the plethora of risks and threats to international peace and security. The threat posed by terrorist and extremist groups to regional stability, international security and human rights is omnipresent. Revolting acts of barbarism have plunged the Middle East into bloodshed — and the people and minorities, notably in Syria and Iraq, into a nightmare. Terrorism is an affront to the conscience of humankind. The recent attacks in Paris, Istanbul, Beirut, Jakarta, San Bernardino, Bamako and Ouagadougou all compound the long list of atrocities committed by those groups, whose tentacles now extend to all continents.

That dramatic expansion is accompanied by a constantly growing wave of refugees, of persecution of religious and ethnic communities, and of widespread violations of human rights. Moreover, the increasing possibility of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons falling into the hands of those terrorist entities considerably increases both the scale and severity of the threat.

In addition, the current impasse in the peace process between Israel and Palestine removes any prospects of a negotiated solution and thereby compounds the threats confronting the region. The destabilizing effects of the suspension of peace talks between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority are clear. They contribute in particular to fuelling extremism, which, as we know, uses the unresolved conflict as a pretext to carry out its fanatical work. The recent outbreak of violence that has indiscriminately struck Israeli and Palestinian civilians is a sad illustration of that. Such a situation could deteriorate at any time and clearly shows the extent to which the status quo is untenable.

The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is undoubtedly a key to stability and peace in the Middle East. The Republic of Haiti is pleased to participate in this open debate, which affords us an opportunity to reiterate our position on this conflict, which has lasted far too long; to express its absolute respect for the major principles of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, whose respect alone can ensure a lasting settlement to the conflict; and to lend its support to the Council's approach aimed at renewing dialogue and enabling the parties to resume the path of negotiations, which remains a necessary precondition for peace.

The position of my delegation is based on a fundamental principle, that is, the right of Israel to exist and to live in safety, within secure and recognized borders, must be universally and unequivocally recognized, just like that of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty in the framework of a viable and democratic State. My delegation believes that the coexistence of two States living in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, taking into account the legitimate security concerns of Israel, is the cornerstone of any solution to the conflict. Pursuant to that position and in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, Haiti, which is linked to Israel through historical ties of friendship dating back to Israel's creation in 1948, has also recognized the Palestinian State, in the belief that the boundaries and borders of that State must be determined through an agreement in the context of a comprehensive, negotiated and final settlement between the two States. To that end, my delegation fully supports the two-State solution — the only one that is worthwhile — and supports all international initiatives, whether they come from the United Nations or other bodies, aimed at reaching a just, equitable and sustainable solution, the modalities of which fall first and foremost to the parties to resolve.

Never has the dynamic commitment of the United Nations to the Middle East been as necessary and desirable as it is today. Faced with the dual challenge of the fight against terrorism and of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the international community must act. On the one hand, it is imperative to take and strengthen the collective measures that are urgently needed to counter the growing threat of terrorism and extremism. On the other hand, is important that the United Nations make every effort to restore the momentum of the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Both actions must be taken with the same resolve.

My delegation believes that the United Nations, with its long experience in the field and the efforts already made to solve the structural problems of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is now best placed to promote a resumption of talks, which are the only route to peace. This solution can be achieved only through a negotiated peace. It requires above all a return to the negotiating table. There can be no conditions attached.

The holding of this meeting is evidence that it will be possible to reach a solution through United Nations mediation. My delegation fully agrees with this approach on the part of the Security Council. It extends its best wishes for this meeting and hopes that it will lead to new ideas and innovative approaches that can pave the way to stability in the Middle East and the early resumption of the diplomatic process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority as the only way to achieve the negotiated, just, comprehensive and lasting settlement desired all parties.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): Allow me to refer to some of the accusations that we have heard here today.

The representative of Lebanon sat here and accused Israel of attempting to undermine the tripartite mechanism and questioned its commitment to resolution 1701 (2006). Interestingly enough, there is no evidence in United Nations reports to support these baseless claims. In fact, it was the Lebanese side that was recently accused of violating the resolution by General Portolano, Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, after the launch of rockets at Israel from southern Lebanon. The rockets were fired by Hizbullah, an armed terrorist organization that still acts freely in southern Lebanon and holds seats in the Lebanese Parliament, which has not even been able to elect a President for the past year and a half. Still, the representative of Lebanon had the audacity to criticize Israel's democracy. Just as a reminder, the terror organization Hibzullah, which sits in the Lebanese Parliament, is the same Hizbullah that assists Al-Assad's forces in besieging the town of Madaya in Syria and in starving its people to death.

The element that is sponsoring Hizbullah's heinous activities is Iran. The sad truth is that wherever there is terror in the Middle East, we can be sure that Iran is behind it. Iran's interventions in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen continue to wreak havoc in the region.

As for Saudi Arabia, as a State that continues to attack and bomb the civilian population in Yemen indiscriminately, it may want to refrain from giving lectures about violations of international humanitarian law.

As for Syria, I would advise its representative to direct the time and energy he spends in writing hateful, false and conspiratorial statements towards approving United Nations requests for humanitarian assistance convoys.

It took a lot of nerve for the representatives of Malaysia and Venezuela — two of the world's worst human rights violators — to criticize the human rights record of the only democracy in the Middle East. We can only hope that one day the people of their countries will enjoy the same freedom of expression as their representatives do here at the United Nations.

With reference to my Palestinian colleagues, after listening this morning to the Palestinian observer I am still left without answers to the fundamental questions. Why will the Palestinians not come to the negotiating table? Why do they continue to refuse to condemn terror against Israel? I have read and reread their statement. It contains not a word of condemnation of terror and nothing about accepting Prime Minister Netanyahu's offer to negotiate.

While the Palestinians demonstrate such passion and energy defaming Israel here at the United Nations, they neglect their responsibility for the people of the Gaza Strip. For their sake, and for the sake of various States that sadly failed to learn the facts before taking the floor here today — including Bangladesh and Nicaragua — allow me to share real information about Israel's major efforts to rehabilitate Gaza and to improve the lives of its population. These are just a few examples of Israel's commitment.

The Israeli Cabinet has approved a range of short-, medium- and long-term measures to address Gaza's water and energy needs, including the addition of a temporary power line and increased accessibility to gas. Every day, thousands of people enter Israel from the Gaza Strip in order to work, do business and receive medical treatment in Israel. This continues despite the fact that we know that Hamas exploits this policy in order to promote terror. Hamas has even used a cancer

patient being treated in an Israeli hospital as a carrier to pass information to terrorists.

As we have stated time and again, Israel is committed to the two-State solution and believes in a better future for Israelis and the Palestinian people alike.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Malaysia has asked to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Mrs. Abdul Hamid (Malaysia): Malaysia takes the floor to reply to the comments made by the representative of Israel.

I would first categorically reject the allegations raised by the representative of Israel against my country. These allegations are baseless and serve no other objective than to divert the Security Council's attention from the real matter at hand — the situation in occupied Palestine. Let me remind the representative of Israel that Malaysia holds the highest respect for human rights and international law. This is in contrast with Israel, which continues to violate countless resolutions and decisions of the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and even the International Criminal Court.

Israel also continues to disrespect human rights by not cooperating with numerous United Nations human rights mechanisms. The resignation of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories earlier this month, which he attributed to frustration at Israel's denial of access to Palestinian territories, provides yet another example of the policy of the so-called only democracy in the Middle East.

I should also reiterate that Malaysia is not an occupying Power, unlike Israel, which is roundly condemned for its illegal practices related to its ongoing occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories. Malaysia is a member of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. This places us in a unique position to see with our own eyes the true nature of the countless extreme violations of human rights committed by the occupying Power.

My delegation's positions on the matter under consideration were made clear in our statement delivered earlier. We therefore urge the Israeli delegation to focus its energy on addressing the various concerns raised by Malaysia and other Member States today instead of attempting to divert our attention with false allegations.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.